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CHRISTINE, THE MODEL;

OR,

STUDIES OF LOVE.

Being the Struggles of Nana's Artist Brother, Claude Lantier, in a new School of Art, wherein Bohemianism and Artist Life in Paris among the Beautiful Models in the Studios are described and vividly and truthfully depicted.

BY ÉMILE ZOLA.

AUTHOR OF "NANA," "L'ASSOMMOIR," "CLAUDE'S CONFESSION," "HELENE," "POT-BOUILLE," "THERESE RAQUIN," "HER TWO HUSBANDS," "ALBINE," "NANA'S BROTHER," "THE GIRL IN SCARLET," "MAGDALEN FERAT," "THE COURT OF LOUIS NAPOLEON," "IN THE WHIRLPOOL," "THE JOYS OF LIFE," "THE MYSTERIES OF MARSEILLES," "THE SHOP GIRLS OF PARIS," "LA BELLE LISA," "A MAD LOVE; OR, THE ABBE AND HIS COURT."

"CHRISTINE, THE MODEL; OR, STUDIES OF LOVE," by Emile Zola, is the latest production of that world-famous realistic novelist's pen, and a most wonderful and absorbing romance it is. Spicy, brilliant, original and startling, it fascinates from the opening paragraph to the closing word. As the setting for this ambitious and daring work, Zola has taken the Bohemian branch of the artistic world in Paris, and the novel progresses amid a thorough dissection of artist life and a complete exposé of the doings and methods of a host of aspiring painters, all of whom are more or less cranks. Zola fairly revels amid these piquant revelations, and they give a zest to his book impossible to describe and certainly unsurpassed. The hero is Nana's brother, Claude Lantier, the son of Gervaise and Lantier of "L'Assommoir." His life with Christine is one long struggle with poverty and false hopes, and the tragedy at the close is perhaps the strongest piece of vivid word-painting in which Zola has yet indulged. Christine is a magnificently drawn character, and she pervades the book, stamping it from beginning to end with her personality. "CHRISTINE, THE MODEL" is sure to create a marked sensation and to become immediately one of the most popular books of the day.

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BEING THE STRUGGLES OF NANA'S ARTIST BROTHER, CLAUDE LANTIER, IN A NEW SCHOOL OF ART, WHEREIN BOHEMIANISM AND ARTIST LIFE IN PARIS AMONG THE BEAUTIFUL MODELS IN THE STUDIOS ARE DESCRIBED AND VIVIDLY AND TRUTHFULLY DEPICTED.

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CHAPTER I.

CLAUDE'S ADVENTURE.

A GIRL staggering through the streets of Paris in a beating thunderstorm at two o'clock in the morning! A tall, handsome young girl, clad in black, drenched, and quivering with terror amid the vivid flashes of lightning that blinded her.

All was impenetrable, inky gloom, save when the flashes came; and in one of these the girl caught sight of a doorway in which she took shelter, all of a tremble.

Claude Lantier, Nana's brother, had gone by the Hôtel de Ville. He was in the streets when the storm had come on. During this scorching July night he had been absently strolling about the Central

Markets, in love with nocturnal Paris. Suddenly the rain grew so heavy that he started off on a run, bewildered, along the Quai de la Grève. Arrived at the Pont Louis Philippe, he suddenly stopped, angry at being out of breath. This dread of the rain was idiotic, he thought. He walked with slackened pace over the bridge in the thick darkness, beneath the beating tempest, his hands hanging at his side.

He had but a short distance further to go. As he came to the Quai Bourbon, on the Isle St. Louis, a vivid flash of lightning showed the old houses fronting the Seine. It lighted up the panes of the lofty windows without shutters, displaying in detail the melancholy fronts of the old-fashioned mansions; a stone balcony, a terrace rail, a garland cut on a frieze. There was the artist's studio, beneath the eaves of the antique Hôtel du Martoy, almost at the corner of the Rue de la Femme-sans-Tête. A loud clap of thunder shook the sleepy quarter, and the quay, that had been brightened for an instant, grew sombre again.

Claude, blinded by the rain, reached his door, a low, iron-studded, rounded affair, and searched for the bell handle. As he fumbled about he gave a start of intense surprise, for he felt, crouching against the woodwork, a living being. A second flash showed that this being was a tall young girl, dressed in black, soaked with the wet, and trembling from head to foot. A second clap of thunder came and Claude cried out:

"You frightened me! Who are you and what are you after here?"

The girl was once more invisible, but he heard her sob and murmur:

"Don't hurt me, monsieur! It was the hackman's fault! I hired him at the railway dépôt, but he abused me and left me here. Near Nevers a train ran off the track. That delayed us four hours and the person who was to wait for me did not stay. I have never

been in this great city before—I don't know anything about Paris. I don't know where I am!"

Another lightning flash. It bewildered her and she stopped suddenly, her affrighted eyes staring at the strange world in which she was, this violet-hued phantom of a weird city. The rain was over by this time. Across the Seine was the Quai des Ormes, with its yellow, white and gray tenements, all of them small, with the woodwork of their shops below and their irregular roofs above in bold outline. All of a sudden the horizon cleared on the left as far as the blue slate eaves of the Hôtel de Ville and on the right, as far as St. Paul's dome of lead. She was oppressed most by the embankment of the river, the deep cut through which the dark and turgid Seine ran from the Pont Maries' heavy piles to the Pont Louis Philippe's light arches. The river was full of strange masses—a fleet of small boats and yawls, a moored washhouse and a dredging machine made fast to the quay. Further down, against the opposite bank, were coal-laden lighters, barges loaded with millstones, the huge arm of a steam crane over them. Then all was again dense blackness. Everything vanished.

"Some outcast," Claude thought, "some wretch kicked out of doors and looking for another prey!"

Instinctively he distrusted women. The accident, the delayed train, the rough driver, all the story told by the girl, was to his mind a foolish invention. When the second thunder clap came, the outcast had shrunk back still more into her corner, quaking with the utmost terror.

"But you cannot stop here all night," he said aloud.

She sobbed still more and stammered: "I beseech you, monsieur, take me to Passy. That's where I was going."

He shrugged his shoulders. Did she take him for

a fool? Mechanically, however, he turned towards the Quai des Célestins, where there was a cabstand. Not the faintest glimmer of a lamp to be seen.

"To Passy, my dear? Why not at once to Versailles while you are about it? Where the deuce do you think one can pick up a cab at this time of night, and in such weather?"

Her only answer was a shriek; a flash of lightning had almost blinded her, and this time she had seen the tragic city spattered with blood. An immense chasm was revealed to her, the two strips of the river stretching away as far as she could see amidst the lurid flames of a conflagration. The smallest details stood out in bold relief: the tiny Venetian blinds of the Quai des Ormes, and the two openings of the Rue de la Masure, and the Rue du Paon-Blanc disparting the line of frontages; near the Pont Marie you could have counted the leaves on the lofty plane trees, standing there like a bouquet of magnificent verdure; while on the other side, beneath the Pont Louis Philippe, at the Mail, the barges ranged in a quadruple line flared with the piles of yellow apples with which they were heavily laden. Then there was the ripple of the water, the high chimney of the floating washhouse, the tightened chain of the dredger, the heaps of sand on the banks, an extraordinary agglomeration of things, quite a little world filling the vast gap from one horizon to the other. But the sky became dark again, and the river flowed on in obscurity amid the roar of the thunder.

"Thank God it's over! Oh, heaven! what's to become of me?"

Just then the rain began to fall again, so stiffly and impelled by such a wind that it swept along the quay with the violence of water escaping through an open lock.

"Come, let me get in," said Claude; "I can stand this no longer."

Both were getting drenched. By the flickering light of the gas lamp fixed to the corner of the Rue de la Femme-sans-Tête he saw the water dripping from her dress, which was clinging to her form, in the deluge that swept against the door. He was seized with compassion. Had he not once picked up a cur on such a stormy night as this? But he felt angry with himself for softening. He never took a stray girl into his place; he treated them all as if ignorant of their existence, with a painful timidity which he disguised under a mask of brutal bravado. And this one really thought him a downright fool, to accost him like that with her adventure—only fit for a farce. Nevertheless, he ended by saying: "That will do; let's get up-stairs. You can sleep in my place."

At this, the girl became even more frightened, and threw up her arms.

"At your place; oh, good heavens! No, no; it's impossible. I beseech you, monsieur, take me to Passy. Let me beg of you!"

Then Claude became angry. Why all this fuss, when he was willing to give her shelter? He had already rung the bell twice. At last the door opened and he pushed the girl before him.

"No, no, monsieur; I tell you, no!"

But another flash dazzled her and when the thunder growled she bounded inside, not knowing what she was about. The heavy door had closed upon them; she was standing under a large archway in complete darkness.

"It's I, Madame Joseph," cried Claude to the door-keeper. Then he added in a whisper: "Give me your hand, we have to cross the court-yard."

The girl did as she was told, she no longer resisted; she was stunned and worn out. Once more they felt

the diluvian rain, as they ran side by side as hard as they could. It was a baronial court-yard, enormous, and surrounded with stone arcades, indistinct amidst the gloom. Then they came to a narrow passage without a door, and he let go her hand. She could hear him trying to strike some matches, and swearing. They were all damp. It was necessary to grope one's way up-stairs.

"Take hold of the banisters, and be careful; the steps are very high."

The staircase, a very narrow one, a former servant's staircase, was divided into three disproportionately high flights, which she climbed, stumbling, with unskilful weary limbs. Then he warned her that they had to follow a long passage. She kept behind him brushing the walls on both sides with outstretched hands, advancing along this endless passage which, with a bend, came back to the front of the building on the quay. There was still another staircase, right under the roof, wooden stairs without a banister which creaked, shaky and almost vertical, like the unplaned rungs of a miller's ladder. The landing at the top was so small that the girl knocked against the young man, fumbling in his pocket for his key. At last he opened the door.

"Don't come in, but wait, else you'll hurt yourself again."

She did not stir. She was panting for breath—her heart was beating fast—there was a buzzing about her ears—she felt completely worn out by this ascent in the dense gloom. It seemed to her as if she had been climbing for hours, in such a maze, amidst such a turning and twisting of stories as to prohibit all idea of ever going down again. Inside the studio there was a shuffling of heavy feet, a rustle of hands groping in the dark, a clatter of things being tumbled

about, accompanied by stifled objurgations. At last the doorway was lighted up.

"Come in, it's all right now."

She went in and looked around, without distinguishing anything. The solitary candle burned dim in this garret more than five yards high, filled with a confused mass of objects, the big shadows of which stood out fantastically on the walls, painted in gray distemper. No, she did not distinguish anything. She mechanically lifted her eyes to the large glazed aperture, against which the rain was beating like the deafening roll of the drum. But just at that moment another flash of lightning illuminated the sky, followed almost immediately by a thunder-clap that seemed to split the roof. Dumb-stricken, pale as death, she dropped on to a chair.

"The devil!" murmured Claude, who also was rather pale. "That clap wasn't far off. We were just in time. It's better here than in the streets, isn't it?"

And he went towards the door, closing it with a bang and turning the key, while she watched him with a dazed look.

"There, now, we are at home."

Besides, it was all over. There were only a few more thunder-claps in the distance, and the rain soon ceased altogether. Claude, who was now growing embarrassed, had examined her, askance. She seemed by no means bad looking, and young assuredly; twenty at the most. This examination had the effect of making him more suspicious still in spite of an unconscious feeling, a vague idea, that she was not altogether deceiving him. In any case, no matter how clever she might be, she was mistaken if she imagined she had caught him. He wilfully exaggerated his curt manner, and said in a gruff voice:

"Well, you'd better go to bed; you'll get dry that way."

Her very anguish made her rise, and in her turn she examined him without daring to look him straight in the face. This bony young man, with his angular joints, his wild bearded head, increased her fear, as if he were a kind of brigand, with his black felt hat, his old brown coat, discolored by rain. She murmured:

"Thank you; I'll do very well as I am."

"What! With your clothes dripping? Don't make an idiot of yourself!"

And he began to knock about the chairs, and flung aside the screen, rent in several places already. Behind it she noticed a washstand and a tiny iron bedstead, from which he began to remove the coverlet.

"No, no, monsieur, it isn't worth while; I assure that I shall stay here."

Whereupon he became angry, gesticulating and shaking his fists.

"How much more of this comedy are we to have? As I give you my bed, what have you to complain of? And you need not play the timid, it's useless. I'll sleep on the lounge."

He strode towards her with a threatening look. Beside herself with fear, thinking that he was going to strike her, she tremblingly unfastened her bonnet. The water was dripping from her skirt. He kept on growling. Nevertheless, a sudden scruple seemed to come over him, for he ended by saying, in a condescending tone:

"You know, if you don't like to sleep in my sheets I'll change them."

He was already dragging them from the bed and flinging them on the couch at the other end of the studio. After this he took a clean pair from the wardrobe and began to make the bed with the deftness of a bachelor used to that kind of thing. He carefully

tucked in the clothes on the side of the wall, shook the pillows, and turned back a corner of the covers.

"There, that'll do; get you to by-bye now."

And as she did not answer but remained motionless, her fingers mechanically fumbling with her bodice, as if loth to onfasten it, he pushed her behind the screen. "Good heavens! what a deal of modesty!" he thought. And he quickly went to bed himself: the sheets spread out on the lounge, his clothes hanging from an old easel, he himself stretched at full length on his back. On the point of blowing out the candle, he reflected that she would have to undress in the dark, and he waited. At first he had not heard her stir; she had no doubt remained standing in the same spot against the iron bedstead. But now he heard a slight rustling of clothes, and a slow, albeit suppressed, movement, as if she were also listening, frightened at the candle which was still being kept burning. At last, after several minutes, the spring mattress creaked, and all became very still.

"Are you all right, mademoiselle?" asked Claude in a gentle voice.

"Yes, monsieur, I am very well," she replied in a scarcely audible voice, still quivering with emotion.

"Very well, then. Good-night."

"Good-night."

He blew out the light, and the silence became more intense. In spite of his fatigue, his eyes soon opened again, and sleeplessness kept them gazing upward at the large window of his studio. The sky had become very clear again, the stars were twinkling in the sultry July night, and, despite the storm, the heat remained so oppressive that he felt as if he were burning, and threw his bare arms outside the sheets. He was thinking about this girl—a silent struggle was going on within him, between the contempt he was proud to evince, the fear of encumbering his existence

and the dread of appearing ridiculous. Contempt, however, gained the upper hand; he believed himself to be very strong-minded; he imagined a romance concocted to destroy his tranquillity, and he gibed contentedly at having frustrated it. He felt still more oppressed, and kicked the sheets from off his legs, while with his head heavy, in the hallucination of semi-slumber, he conjured up amid the glistening stars the forms of women, all the living flesh which he worshipped.

Then his ideas became more and more confused. What was she doing? For a long while he had thought that she had gone to sleep, for she scarcely seemed to breathe, and now he heard her turn round, as he had done, but with infinite precautions that paralyzed her movements. With his meagre experience of women, he endeavored to draw a conclusion from the story she had told him, struck at present by certain small facts, and feeling perplexed; but such logic as he possessed refused to come to his aid. Why, after all, should he worry his brain—what for? He did not care a rap whether she had told him the truth or a lie. In the morning she would go off; there would be an end to it all, and they would never see each other again. It was only towards daybreak when the stars began to pale that he fell asleep. As for the girl behind the screen, she continued, in spite of the crushing fatigue of her journey, to toss about uneasily, oppressed by the heaviness of the atmosphere beneath the heated zincwork of the roof; and she experienced a sudden shock of nervous impatience, she gave an irritated sigh in the uneasiness caused her by the presence of a man sleeping near by, almost within arm's length.

In the morning, when Claude awoke, his eyes kept blinking. It was very late, and a flood of sunshine came through the large window. One of his theories

was that young landscape painters should take studios despised by academical figure painters; studios which the sun inundated with his living beams. Nevertheless he felt dazzled, and sat down again on the couch, his legs bare. Why the devil had he been sleeping on his couch? His eyes, still heavy with sleep, wandered mechanically around his studio, when he noticed, half hidden by the screen, a heap of petticoats. Then he remembered at once all about the girl. He began to listen, and heard a long and regular breathing, like that of a child comfortably asleep. All right, she was still slumbering, and so calmly that it would be a pity to disturb her. He felt giddy, and scratched his legs, somewhat annoyed at this adventure, which again took a hold on him, and which would spoil his morning's work. He got angry at his own good nature; it was better to shake her, so that she might go at once. Nevertheless he softly slipped on his trousers, put on a pair of slippers and walked about on tiptoe.

The cuckoo clock struck nine, and Claude made a gesture of annoyance. Nothing had stirred; the regular breathing continued. The best thing to do, he thought, would be to set to work at his large picture; he would see to his breakfast later on, when he was able to move about. But after all he could not make up his mind. He who lived amid chronic disorder felt worried by this heap of petticoats lying on the floor. The water had dripped from them, but they were damp still. And while grumbling in a low tone he ended by picking them up one by one and spreading them on the chairs in the sunlight. Did one ever see the like, clothes thrown about anyhow? They would never get dry and she would never go off! He turned and twisted this woman's apparel very awkwardly, got entangled with the black stuff dress-body, went on all fours to look for the stock-

ings that had fallen behind an old canvas. They were Balbriggan stockings of a dark gray, long and fine, and he examined them, before hanging them up to dry. The bottom of the dress had soaked them, so he wrung them, then passed them between his warm hands, in order to send her away the quicker.

Since he had been on his legs, Claude had been sorely tempted to push aside the screen and to have a look at his guest. This self-condemned curiosity only increased his bad temper. At last, with his habitual shrug of the shoulders, he was taking up his brushes, when some words were stammered amidst a rustling of bed clothes; the soft breathing was heard again, and this time he yielded to the temptation, dropping his brushes, and putting his head behind the screen. The sight that met his eyes rooted him to the spot, so fascinated that he muttered: "By the gods! by the gods!"

The young girl, amidst the hot-house heat that came from the window, had partially tossed aside the sheets, and, overcome with the fatigue of a restless night, she now slept, bathed in a flood of sunshine, so unconscious of everything that not a quiver stirred her. Her right arm was encircling her neck, her head in deep repose was thrown back in a charming posture of abandonment, while her black tresses, unwound, enwrapped her like a dusky cloak.

"By the gods, she is awfully fine!" muttered Claude once more.

There it was, in every point, the figure he had looked for in vain for his picture and almost in the right pose. She was rather slender, rather childishly spare, but so lithe and fresh. She was a real find.

With a light step, Claude ran to take his box of crayons, and a large sheet of paper. Then, squatting on a low chair, he placed a portfolio on his knees and began to sketch with an air of perfect happiness.

All his trouble, all his unhealthy curiosity vanished in the surprise of the artist, in his enthusiasm at the splendid flesh tints and well-set muscles. He had already forgotten the girl in his admiration of the delicately amber-hued shoulders. Face to face with nature, an uneasy mistrust of his powers made him feel small. So squaring his elbows, he became, as it were, a mere urchin, very good, attentive, and respectful. This lasted for about a quarter of an hour, during which he paused now and then, blinking at the figure before him. Being afraid, however, of her changing her position, he speedily set to work again, holding his breath, lest he might awaken her.

Nevertheless, while applying himself to his work, vague fancies again began swarming in his mind. Who could she be? Assuredly not what he had thought, for she was too fresh looking. But why had she told him such an unbelievable story? Then he began to imagine other stories. A beginner but lately arrived in Paris with a lover, who had abandoned her; or some young woman of the middle classes led into bad company by a female friend, and not daring to go home to her relatives; or else a drama more complicated still; something horrible, inexplicable, the truth of which he would never fathom. All these hypotheses increased his perplexity. Meanwhile he began to sketch her face, studying it with care. The whole of its upper part, the clear forehead, smooth like a polished mirror, the small nose, with its delicately chiselled and nervous nostrils; denoted goodness and gentleness. One divined the sweet smile of the eyes beneath the closed lids; a smile that would light up the whole of her features. Unfortunately the lower part marred this expression of sweetness; the jaw was prominent, the lips, rather too full, almost showed the blood, over the strong white teeth. It was like a flash of passion, the harbinger of awakening woman-

hood, still unconscious of itself amidst those traits of childlike softness.

Suddenly a shiver ran like a ripple over the satin-like skin. The girl had perhaps felt this man's look mentally dissecting her. She opened her eyes very wide and uttered a cry:

"Ah! great heavens!"

A sudden terror paralyzed her, as it were, at the sight of this strange room, of this young man in his shirt-sleeves crouching in front of her and devouring her with his eyes. With the impulse of despair she pulled up the counterpane, and kept it tight over her shoulders with both arms, her blood sent coursing so violently by the anguish of modesty that the burning flush on her cheeks spread in a rosy flow.

"Well, what's the matter?" cried Claude, angrily, his pencil suspended in mid-air; "what wasp has stung you now?"

She neither spoke or stirred, but remained doubled up almost, with the counterpane tightly wrapped round her throat, her body gathered up and scarcely showing its outline beneath the bed-clothes.

"I won't eat you, will I? Come, just put yourself as you were, there's a good girl."

Again she blushed up to her very ears. At last she stammered: "Oh, no, monsieur, no—pray!"

But he began to lose his temper altogether. One of the fits of anger to which he was subject was coming upon him. Her obstinacy seemed stupid to him.

"What does it matter to you, say? Where's the harm?"

Then she began to sob, which made him altogether angry, in despair before his sketch, losing his head at the thought that he would not be able to finish it, that this girl's prudishness would prevent him from getting a capital study for his picture.

"Well, you won't eh? But it's idiotic. For whom

do you take me? Did I as much as come near you? Besides, listen, it is very unkind of you to refuse me this service, because, after all, I sheltered you!"

She only continued to cry, her head buried in the pillow.

"I assure you that I am very much in want of this sketch, else I wouldn't worry you."

He was surprised at the girl's tears, and ashamed at having been so rough with her, so he held his tongue, at last, feeling embarrassed, and let her have time to recover herself a bit. Then he began again, in a very gentle tone:

"Well, as it annoys you, let's say no more about it. But if you only knew. I've got a figure in my picture which doesn't make headway at all, and you were just in the very note. As for me, when it's a question of painting, I'd kill father and mother. Well, you'll excuse me, won't you? And if you'd wish me to be very nice, you'd just give me a few minutes more. No, no; keep quiet as you are; I don't want the bust—I don't want it. Only the head—nothing but the head. If I could finish that, it would be all right. Really now be kind; put your arm as it was before, and I'll be very grateful to you—grateful all my life long."

It was he who was supplicating now, pitifully waving his pencil amid the emotion of his artistic craving. Besides, he had not stirred, but remained crouching on his low chair, at a distance from the bed. At last she risked the ordeal and uncovered her tranquillized face. What else could she do? She was at his mercy, and he looked so wretchedly unhappy.

Nevertheless she still hesitated, a last scruple. Then, without saying a word, she slowly brought her bare arm from beneath the clothes and again slipped it under her head, taking care, however, to hold the clothes with the other hand tightly round her throat.

"Ah! how kind you are! I'll make haste, you will be free in a minute."

He bent over his drawing, and only looked at her now and then with the glance of the painter for whom the woman has disappeared, and who only sees the model. At first she became pink again; the consciousness that she showed that bare arm, that small part of herself which she would have shown in a ball-room, without thinking about it, filled her with confusion. Nevertheless the young man seemed so reasonable that she became altogether reassured. The blush left her cheeks, her lips parted with a vague, confiding smile. And between her half-opened eyelids she began to study him. How he had frightened her the night before with his thick brown beard, his large head, his impulsive gestures. And yet he was not ugly; she even discovered in his small eyes a great fund of tenderness, while his nose altogether surprised her. It was a finely-cut woman's nose, almost lost in the bristling hair on his lips. He was slightly shaking with a nervous anxiety that made his pencil seem a living thing in his hand, and which touched her without her knowing why. She felt sure he was not bad-natured, his brutal ways arose from bashfulness. She did not analyze all this very clearly, but she divined it, and she began to put herself at her ease, as if she were with a friend.

Nevertheless, the studio continued to frighten her a little. She cast sidelong glances around it, astonished at so much disorder and abandonment. Before the stove the cinders of the last winter still lay in a heap. Besides the bed, the small washstand, and the couch, there was no other furniture than an old dilapidated oaken wardrobe and a large deal table, littered with brushes, colors, dirty plates, a spirit lamp, atop of which was a saucepan, with shreds of vermicelli sticking to its sides. Some rush-bottomed chairs, their seats the

worse for wear, were scattered about beside spavined easels. Near the divan the candle of the night before was lying on the floor, which seemed not to have been swept for at least a month. There was only the cuckoo clock, an enormous one, its dial illuminated with crimson flowers, that looked clean and bright, ticking sonorously all the while. But what especially frightened her were the sketches hanging from the walls, without frames, a serried array that reached to the floor, where they mingled with heaps of canvases thrown about anyhow. She had never seen such terrible painting, coarse, glaring, with a violence of color that jarred upon her like a carter's oath heard on the doorstep of an inn. She cast down her eyes, and yet she was attracted by a picture, the back of which was turned to her. It was the large canvas at which the painter was working, and which he pushed against the wall every night, the better to judge it on the morrow in the surprise of the first glance. What could it hide, that one, seeing that he did not even dare to show it? And through the vast room, the sheet of burning sunlight, falling straight from the window panes, unchecked by any blind, spread with the flow of molten gold on all the broken-down furniture, the devil-may-care shabbiness of which it set in still bolder relief.

Claude, upon whom this continued silence began to weigh, wanted to say something, no matter what, first, in order to be polite, and more especially to divert her attention from her pose. But cudgel his brain as he would, he could only think of this question:

"Pray, what is your name?"

She opened her eyes, which she had closed, as if going to sleep again.

"Christine."

At this he seemed surprised. Neither had he told her his name. Since the night before they were there without knowing each other.

"My name is Claude."

And, having looked at her just at that moment, he saw her burst into a pretty laugh. It was the sudden, merry peal of a big girl still nothing more than a hoyden. She considered this tardy exchange of names rather droll. Then something else amused her.

"How funny—Claude, Christine—they begin with the same letter."

They were both silent once more. He was blinking at his work, entirely lost in it, feeling at a loss how to continue the conversation. He fancied that she was beginning to get tired and uncomfortable, and in his fear at her stirring, he said at random, merely to occupy her thoughts: "It feels rather warm."

This time she checked her laughter, her natural gayety that revived and burst forth in spite of herself, since she had become reassured. But the heat was so oppressive that she felt as if in a bath, her skin moist and bleaching, like the milky-white petals of a camellia.

"Yes, it feels rather warm," she said, seriously, though mirth was dancing in her eyes.

Whereupon Claude continued with a good-natured air:

"It's the sun falling straight in; but, after all, it does one good, a flood of sunshine on one's skin. We could have done with some of it last night at the door, couldn't we?"

Both burst out laughing, and he, delighted at having hit upon a subject of conversation, questioned her about her adventure, without, however, feeling inquisitive, and caring little to discover the real truth, only intent upon prolonging the sitting.

Christine simply, and in a few words, related what had befallen her. The previous day she had left Clermont early in the morning for Paris, where she was to have a situation as reader and companion to

the widow of a general, Madame Vanzade, a rich old lady, who lived at Passy. The train was timed to reach Paris at ten minutes past nine in the evening, and a maid was to meet her at the station. They had even settled by letter upon a means of recognition. She was to wear a black hat with a gray feather in it. But, a little above Nevers, her train had come upon a goods train that had run off the rails, and the smashed trucks of which obstructed the line. There was quite a series of mishaps and delays. First an interminable wait in the carriages which the passengers had to leave at last, luggage and all, to trudge to the next station, three kilomètres distant, where the authorities had decided to make up another train. By this time they had lost two hours, and another two were lost in the confusion caused by the accident, from one end of the line to the other, so that they reached the Paris terminus four hours behind time, at one o'clock in the morning.

"Bad luck, indeed," interrupted Claude, still skeptical, though half-disarmed already, in his surprise at the neat way in which the girl arranged the complications of her story. "And, of course, there was no one at the station to meet you?" he added.

In fact, Christine had missed Madame Vanzade's maid, who, no doubt, had grown tired of waiting. She told Claude of her utter helplessness in the Lyons station, that large, strange, dark and empty hall, which soon became deserted at that hour. She had not dared to take a cab at first, but kept walking up and down, carrying her small bag, still hoping that some one would come for her. But at last she made up her mind; too late, however, for there only remained one driver, very dirty and smelling of drink, who prowled round her, offering his cab in a knowing, impudent way.

"Yes, I know, a dawdler," said Claude, getting as

interested as if he were present at the realization of a fairy tale. "Then you got into his cab?"

Looking up to the ceiling, Christine continued, without shifting her position:

"He made me; he called me his little dear, and frightened me. When he found out that I was going to Passy, he became very angry, and whipped his horse so hard that I was obliged to hold on by the doors. After that I felt more easy, because the cab trundled along all right through the lighted streets, and I saw people about. At last I recognized the Seine, though I was never in Paris before, but I had looked at a map. Naturally I thought he would keep along the quay, when I was made very frightened again by noticing that we crossed a bridge. Just then it began to rain, and the cab, which had got into a very dark turning, suddenly stopped. It was the driver getting down from his seat, and wanting to come inside with me. He said it was raining too hard."

Claude burst out laughing. He no longer doubted. She could not have invented that driver. And as she suddenly stopped, somewhat confused, he said: "All right, he was having a joke."

"I jumped out at once by the other door," resumed Christine. "Then he began to swear at me, saying that we had arrived, and that he would tear my bonnet from my head if I did not pay him. It was raining in torrents, and the quay was absolutely deserted. I was losing my head and pulled out a five-franc piece. Whereupon he whipped his horse and drove off, taking my little bag, which luckily contained nothing but two pocket-handkerchiefs, part of a cake, and the key of my trunk, left behind in the train."

"But you ought to have taken his number," exclaimed the artist indignantly. In fact he now remembered to have been brushed against by a cab rattling along furiously while he was crossing the Pont Louis

Philippe, amid the downpour of the storm. And he wondered at the look of improbability truth often assumed. The story he had conjured up as being the most simple and logical was utterly stupid by the side of the natural and infinite chain of combinations to be met with in life.

"You may imagine how I felt under this doorway," concluded Christine. "I knew well enough that I was not at Passy, and that I should have to spend the night there, in this terrible Paris. And there was the thunder and the lightning, those horrible blue and red flashes, showing me things that made me tremble."

She had closed her eyelids once more; she shivered, and the color left her cheeks, as in her fancy she again beheld the tragic city, that line of quays stretching away in a furnace-like blaze, that deep moat of the river, with its leaden waters careering along, obstructed by immense black masses, lighters looking like lifeless whales, and bristling with motionless cranes stretching forth their gallows-like arms. Was that a welcome?

Again there was a silence. Claude had resumed his drawing. But she became restless, her arm was getting stiff.

"Just put your elbow a little lower, please," said Claude. Then, with an air of concern, as if to excuse his curtness: "Your parents will be very uneasy, if they have heard of the accident."

"I have no parents."

"What? Neither father nor mother? You are all alone in the world?"

"Yes, all alone."

She was eighteen years old, and had been born in Strasburg, quite by chance though, between two changes of garrison, for her father was a soldier, Captain Hallegrain. Just as she entered upon her twelfth year, the captain, a Gascon, hailing from Montauban, had died

at Clermont, where he had settled, when paralysis of the legs obliged him to retire from active service. For nearly five years after that, her mother, a Parisian by birth, had remained in this provincial town, managing as well as she could with her scant pension, but eking it out by painting fans, in order to bring up her daughter like a lady. She had died fifteen months previously, leaving her child penniless and unprotected, without a friend, save the Superior of the Sisters of the Visitation, who had kept her with them. She had come straight from the convent, the Superior having succeeded in procuring her the situation of reader and companion to her old friend, Madame Vanzade, who was almost blind.

At these additional particulars, Claude sat absolutely speechless. This convent, this well-bred orphan, this adventure, taking so romantic a turn, made him relapse into his old embarrassment, into his former awkwardness of gesture and speech. He had left off drawing, and sat looking with downcast eyes at his sketch.

"Is Clermont pretty?" he asked, at last.

"Not very, it's a gloomy town. Besides, I do not know; I scarcely ever went out."

She was resting on her elbow, and continued, in a very low voice, as if talking to herself—in a voice broken, as it were, by the sobs of her bereavement:

"Mamma, who was not very strong, killed herself with work. She spoilt me; nothing was too good for me. I had all sorts of masters, but I did not get on very well; first, because I fell ill, then because I paid no attention. I was always laughing and skipping about like a featherbrain. I didn't care for music, and the piano gave me the cramp in my arms. The only thing I cared about at all was painting."

He raised his hand and interrupted her. "Then you can paint?"

"Oh, no; I know nothing at all. Mamma, who was

very talented, made me do a little bit of water-color, and I sometimes helped her with the backgrounds of her fans. She painted some lovely ones."

In spite of herself, she cast a glance round the room, and on the startling sketches with which the walls seemed ablaze, as it were, and her limpid eyes became troubled again with uneasy surprise at this brutal style of painting. From where she lay she could see the study of herself which the painter had begun, and her consternation at the violent tones, at the rough pastel strokes, with which the shadows were dashed off, prevented her from asking to look at it closer. She was, besides, getting very uncomfortable in this bed, where she was broiling; she was fidgetting with the idea of going off, putting an end to all these things that seemed, ever since the night before, so much of a dream.

Claude, no doubt, became aware of this discomfort. A sudden feeling of shame brought with it one of compunction. He put away his unfinished sketch, and said, very quickly: "Much obliged for your kindness, mademoiselle. Forgive me, I have really abused it. Yes, indeed; pray get up. It's time for you to look for your friends."

And without appearing to understand why she did not follow his advice, but hid her bare arm more and more in proportion to his coming nearer, he still insisted upon her getting up. Then, as the real state of things struck him, he swung his arms about like a madman, replaced the screen, and went to the far end of the studio, where he began noisily setting his crockery in order, so that she might jump out and dress herself, without fear of being overheard.

Amidst the din he had thus raised, he failed to hear her hesitating voice, "Monsieur, monsieur—"

At last he did hear:

"Monsieur, would you be so kind—I can't find my stockings."

Claude hurried forward. What had he been thinking about? What was she to do behind that screen without her stockings and skirts, which he had spread out in the sunlight? The stockings were dry, he assured himself of the fact by softly rubbing them together, and he handed them to her across the partition, again noticing her arm, bare, plump and rosy like that of a child. Then he threw the skirts on the foot of the bed, pushed her boots forward, leaving nothing but her bonnet suspended from the easel. She had thanked him and that was all; he scarcely distinguished the rustling of her clothes and the discreet splashing of water. Still, he continued to concern himself about her.

"You will find the soap in a saucer on the table. Open the drawer and take a clean towel. Do you want more water? I'll give you the pitcher."

Suddenly the idea that he was blundering again exasperated him.

"There, there, I am only worrying you. I will leave you to your own devices. Do as if you were at home."

And he continued to potter about among the crockery. He was debating with himself whether he should ask her to stay to breakfast. He ought not to let her go like this. On the other hand, if she did stay, he would never get done; he would lose the whole of his morning. Without deciding anything, when he had lighted his spirit lamp, he washed his saucepan and began to make some chocolate. He thought it more distingué, feeling rather ashamed of his vermicelli, which he mixed with bread and soused with oil as people do in the South. However, he was still breaking the chocolate into bits, when he uttered a cry of surprise, "What, already?"

It was Christine who had pushed back the screen,

and who appeared, looking neat and correct in her black dress, duly laced and buttoned up, equipped, as it were, in a jiffy. Her rosy face did not even show traces of the water, her thick hair was twisted in a knot at the back of her head, not a single hair out of place. And Claude remained open-mouthed before this miracle of quickness, before this evidence of feminine skill in dressing well and promptly.

"The deuce, if you go about everything in that way!"

He found her taller and handsomer than he had fancied. But what struck him most was her look of quiet decision. She was evidently no longer afraid of him. It seemed as though on jumping out of that tumbled bed, where she felt herself defenceless, she had redonned her armor, together with her dress and boots.

She smiled and looked him straight in the face. Whereupon he said what he was still reluctant to say:

"You'll breakfast with me, won't you?"

But she refused. "No, thank you. I am going to the station, where my trunk must have arrived by now, and then I shall drive to Passy."

It was in vain he told her that she must be hungry, that it was unreasonable for her to go out without having eaten something.

"Well, if you will not, I'll go down and fetch you a cab."

"Pray don't take such trouble."

"But you can't go such a distance on foot. Let me, at least, take you to the cabstand, as you don't know Paris."

"No, really I do not want you. If you wish to oblige me, let me go away by myself."

She had evidently made up her mind. She no doubt, shrank from the idea of being seen with a man, even by strangers. She meant to remain silent about

the previous night, she meant to tell some falsehood and keep the recollection of her adventure to herself. He made a violent gesture, which was tantamount to sending her to the devil. Good riddance; it suited him better not to have to go down. But he felt hurt at heart, and considered that she was ungrateful.

"As you please, then. I shan't resort to force," he said.

At these words, Christine's vague smile became more accentuated, and the pretty corners of her lips were slightly lowered. She did not reply, but took her bonnet and looked round in search of a glass. Failing to find one, she tied the strings as best she could. Her arms uplifted, she arranged and smoothed the ribbons leisurely, her face turned to the golden rays of the sun. Somewhat surprised, Claude looked in vain for the traits of childish softness he had just drawn; the upper part of her face, her clear, forehead, her gentle eyes had become less conspicuous; and now the lower part stood out, with its sensual jaw, its ruddy mouth and superb teeth. And still she smiled with that enigmatical, girlish smile which was, perhaps, an ironical one.

"At any rate," he said, in a vexed tone, "I do not think you have anything to reproach me with."

At this she could not help laughing, with a slight, nervous laugh.

"No, no, monsieur, not in the least."

He continued to stare at her, fighting the battle of inexperience and bashfulness over again, and fearing that he had been ridiculous. What in the world could this big girl know? No doubt what every schoolgirl knows—everything and nothing—a depth not to be sounded, the mysterious hatching of the heart and the senses which no one witnesses. Had this girl, a combination of modesty and sensuality, awoke to consciousness, with mingled curiousness and

fear of man, amidst the unrestrained surroundings of artist life? Now that she no longer trembled at him, had she become contemptuously surprised at having trembled at all? What! not the slightest attempt at courtship, not even a kiss on her finger-tips? The bearish indifference of this young man, which she had felt, to be sure, must have hurt in her the woman which she was not as yet; and now she was going off.

"You were saying," she resumed, again becoming sedate, "that the cabstand is at the end of the bridge on the opposite quay?"

"Yes, at the spot where there is a clump of trees."

She had finished tying her bonnet strings, and stood ready to go, gloved, her hands hanging by her side, and yet she did not go, but stared straight in front of her. Her eyes having lighted on the large canvas turned to the wall, she felt a wish to see it, but did not dare to ask. Nothing detained her; still she seemed to be looking round as if she had a sensation of having forgotten something—a nameless something. At last she went towards the door.

Claude was already opening it, and a small loaf placed against the post tumbled into the studio.

"You see," he said, "you ought to have stopped to breakfast with me. My doorkeeper brings the bread up every morning."

She again refused with a shake of the head. When she was on the landing, she turned round and remained quite still for a moment. Her gay smile had come back; she was the first to hold out her hand.

"Thank you, thank you very much."

He had taken her small gloved hand within his large one all pastel-stained as it was. Both hands remained like that for a few moments, closely pressed and shaking each other cordially. The young girl was still smiling at him, and he had a question on the tip of his tongue:

"When shall I see you again?"

But he felt ashamed to ask, and after waiting awhile she withdrew her hand.

"Adieu, monsieur."

"Adieu, mademoiselle."

Christine, without another glance, was already descending the steep ladder, the steps of which creaked, and Claude turned abruptly into his studio, closing the door with a bang and shouting to himself: "Ah! those confounded women!"

He was furious, furious with himself, furious with every one. Kicking about the furniture, he continued to ease his feelings in a loud voice. Was not he right never to allow one to cross his threshold? They only turned a fellow's head. What proof had he after all that the one with the innocent look, just gone, had not fooled him most abominably? And he had been silly enough to believe in so many stories. All his suspicions revived. No one would ever make him swallow the general's widow, the railway accident and especially that cabman. Did such things ever happen in real life? Besides, that mouth of hers told a strange tale, and her look had been singular just when she was going. And if he could only have made out why she had told him all those falsehoods; but no, they were profitless; inexplicable. It was art for art's sake. How she must be laughing at him by this time!

He violently folded up the screen and sent it flying into a corner. She had, no doubt, left plenty of disorder. And when he found that everything was in its proper place—basin, towel, and soap—he flew into a rage because she had not made the bed. With a great deal of fuss he began to make it himself, lifting the still warm mattress in his arms, banging the scented pillow about with his fists, and feeling stifled by the warmth, the pure smell of youth rising from

the bed-clothes. Then he, himself, had a good wash to cool his forehead, and in the damp towel he found the same virgin fragrance, the diffused softness of which oppressed him as it spread through the studio. Swearing all the while, he drank his chocolate from the saucepan, so excited, so eager to set to work, as to swallow large mouthfuls of bread without taking breath.

"Why, it's enough to kill one here!" he suddenly exclaimed. "It's this confounded heat that's making me ill!"

After all, the sun had shifted, and it was far less hot. But he opened a small window on a level with the roof, and breathed with profound relief the whiff of heated air that entered. He had taken up his sketch of Christine's head, and for a long while he remained absorbed in looking at it.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARTIST AND HIS FRIENDS.

IT had struck twelve, and Claude was working at his picture, when there was a loud, familiar knock at the door. With an instinctive but voluntary impulse, the artist slipped Christine's head, by the aid of which he was remodeling the principal figure of his picture, into a portfolio. After that he decided to open the door.

"You, Pierre!" he exclaimed, "already!"

Pierre Sandoz, a friend of his boyhood, was about twenty-two, very dark, with a round and determined head, a square nose, gentle eyes, set in energetic features, framed with a sprouting beard.

"I breakfasted earlier than usual," he answered, "in order to give you a long sitting. The deuce! you are getting on." He had stationed himself in front of the picture, and he added almost immediately: "Hello! you have altered the character of your woman's features!"

Then came a long silence, they both kept staring at the canvas without stirring. It measured about five yards by three, and was entirely painted in, though but little of it had gone beyond the roughing-out. This roughing-out, hastily dashed off, was superb in its violence and ardent vitality of color. A flood of sunlight dipped into a forest clearing, with thick walls of verdure: to the left, a dark glade stretched away, with a small luminous speck in the far distance. On the grass, amidst the summer vegetation, a woman

was stretched, with one arm supporting her head, and inflating her bust, and she smiled with closed eyes in the golden shower that eddied around her. In the background, two other women, the one fair, the other dark, were wrestling with each other in fun, and stood out in their flesh tints against the green leaves. And, as the painter had wanted a dark contrast in the foreground, he had simply contented himself by seating there a gentleman, dressed in a black velveteen jacket. This gentleman had his back turned. One saw nothing of him but his left hand, with which he was supporting himself on the grass.

"The woman promises well," said Sandoz at last; "but, dash it, there will be a lot of work in all this."

Claude, with his eyes blazing in front of his picture, made a gesture of confidence. "I've lots of time from now till the Salon. One can do a great deal of work in six months. And perhaps this time I'll be able to prove that I am not a brute."

Wherewith he set up a whistle, inwardly pleased at the sketch he had made of Christine's head, buoyed up by one of those flashes of hope whence he so often dropped more violently into his worries as an artist, whom a passion for nature was consuming.

"That'll do. No more idling," he shouted. "As you're here, let us set to."

Sandoz, out of pure friendship, and to save him the cost of a model, had offered to pose for the gentleman in the foreground. In four or five Sundays, the only day on which he was free, the figure would be finished. He was already donning the velveteen jacket, when a sudden reflection made him stop.

"But, I say, you haven't really breakfasted, seeing that you were working when I came in. Just go down and have a cutlet while I wait here."

The idea of losing time revolted Claude. "I tell you I have breakfasted. Look at the saucepan. Besides,

you can see there's a crust of bread left. I'll eat it. Come, to work, to work, lazybones."

And he snatched up his palette and caught his brushes, saying, as he did so: "Dubuche is coming to fetch us this evening, isn't he?"

"Yes, about five o'clock."

"Well, that's all right then. We'll go down to dinner at once when he comes. Are you ready? The hand more to the left, and your head a little more forward."

Having arranged the cushions, Sandoz settled himself on the couch in the attitude required. His back was turned, but all the same the conversation continued for another minute, for he had that very morning received a letter from Plassans, the little Provençal town where he and the artist had known each other when they were wearing out their first pairs of trousers on the eighth form of the college. Then they left off talking. The one was working, his thoughts engrossed by a world of his own, while the other grew stiff and cramped in the sleepy fatigue of protracted immobility.

It was only when Claude was nine years old that a lucky chance had enabled him to leave Paris for the small nook of Provence where he had been born. His mother, a hard-working laundress, whom his ne'er-do-well father had scandalously deserted, had married an honest artisan, madly in love with her fair, smooth face. But, in spite of their endeavors, they failed to make both ends meet. Hence they gladly accepted the offer of an elderly and well-to-do townsman to send the lad to school and keep him with him. It was the generous freak of an eccentric amateur of painting, struck by the little figures the urchin had often daubed. And for seven years Claude had remained in the South, at first as a boarder at the college, and afterwards living with his protector. The latter was found dead in his bed one morning. He left the lad a thousand francs

a year, with the faculty of disposing of the principal when he reached the age of twenty-five. Claude, already seized with a passion for painting, immediately left the college, and, without even attempting to secure a bachelor's degree, rushed to Paris, whither his friend Sandoz had preceded him.

At the College of Plassans, while they were still in the lowest form, there had been three inseparables—Claude Lantier, Pierre Sandoz and Louis Dubuche. Sprung from three different classes of society, by no means similar in character, only born in the same year at a few months interval, they had become friends at once and for aye, impelled by certain secret affinities, the still vague promptings of a common ambition, the dawning consciousness of a superior intelligence, amidst the brutal set of dunces who maltreated them. Sandoz's father, a Spaniard, who had taken refuge in France in consequence of a political disturbance in which he had been mixed up, had started, close to Plassans, a paper mill with new machinery of his own invention. When he died, almost heart-broken by the petty local jealously that had sought to hamper him in every way, his widow found herself in a position so involved, and burdened with so many tangled law suits, that the whole of her remaining means was swallowed up. She was a native of Burgundy. Yielding to her hatred of the Provençals, laying at their door even the slow paralysis from which she was suffering, she migrated to Paris with her son, who then supported her out of a meagre clerk's salary, he, himself, haunted by the vision of literary glory. As for Dubuche, he was the son of a baker of Plassans. Pushed by his mother, a covetous and ambitious woman, he joined his friends in Paris later on. He was attending the courses at the School of Arts as a pupil architect, living as best he might with the final five-franc pieces that his parents staked on his head, with the obstinacy of usurers

discounting the future at the rate of a hundred per cent.

"Dash it!" exclaimed Sandoz, breaking the intense silence that hung upon the room. "The position is not easy; my wrist feels broken. Can I move for a moment?"

Claude let him stretch himself without answering. He was working at the velveteen jacket, laying on the color with thick strokes of the brush. Then stepping backward and blinking his eyes, he burst into loud laughter at some sudden reminiscence.

Ah! those were happy days, worthy of the affectionate laughter with which they renewed their memories. The walls of the studio happened to be hung with a series of sketches, which the painter had made during a recent trip. It seemed as if they were surrounded by the familiar horizons, the bright blue sky overhanging the brown country. Here stretched a plain dotted with stunted grayish olive trees, as far as the rosy network of the distant hills. There, between sunburnt russet slopes, the turbid Viorne was almost running dry beneath the span of an old bridge, dust bepowdered, without a bit of green, save a few bushes, dying for want of moisture. Farther on, the mountain gorge of the Infernets showed its yawning chasm amidst tumbled rocks, struck by lightning, an immense chaos, a wild desert, rolling its stony billows as far as the eye could reach. Then came all sorts of well remembered nooks: the Valley of Repentance, narrow and shady, a refreshing oasis amid the calcined fields; the wood of Les Trois Bons-Dieux, with its hard, green, varnished pines shedding pitchy tears beneath the burning sun; the sheep walk of Bouffan, showing white, like a mosque, amidst the far-stretching blood-red plain. And there were yet other sketches, bits of blinding, sinuous roads; ravines, where the heat seemed even to wring bubbling perspiration from the pebbles; stretches of arid, thirsty sand, drinking up

the river drop by drop; mole hills, goat paths and hill crests, half lost in the azure sky.

"Hello!" exclaimed Sandoz, turning towards one sketch, "what's that?"

Claude, indignant, waved his palette. "What! don't you remember? We were very nigh breaking our necks there. Surely you recollect the day we clambered from the very bottom of Jaumegarde with Dubuche? The rock was as smooth as your hand, and we had to cling to it with our nails, so that at one moment we could neither get up nor go down. When once atop and about to cook our cutlets, we, you and I, nearly came to blows."

Sandoz now remembered. "Yes, yes; each one had to roast his own cutlet on rosemary sticks, and, as mine took fire, you exasperated me by chaffing my cutlet, which was being reduced to cinders.

They both shook with laughter, until the painter resumed his work, gravely concluding: "That's all over, old man. There is to be no more idling at present."

He spoke the truth. Since the three inseparables had realized their dream of being together in Paris, which they were bent upon conquering, their life had been terribly hard. They had tried to renew the long walks of old. On certain Sunday mornings they had started on foot from the barrière of Fontainebleau, had scoured the copses of Verrières, gone as far as Bièvre, crossed the woods of Meudon and Bellevue, and returned by way of Grenelle. But they taxed Paris with spoiling their legs; they scarcely ever left the pavement now, entirely taken up as they were with their struggle for fortune.

From Monday morning till Saturday night Sandoz sat fuming and fretting at the Mairie of the fifth arrondissement in a dark corner of the registry office for births, rooted to his stool by the sole thought of

his mother, whom his hundred and fifty francs per month helped to keep somehow. Dubuche, anxious to pay his parents the interest of the moneys placed on his head, was ever on the lookout for some petty jobs among the architects, outside his studies at the School of Arts. As for Claude, thanks to his thousand francs a year, he had his full liberty; but the latter days of the month were terrible enough, especially if he had to share the fag-end of his allowance. Luckily he began to sell a bit; some tiny canvases, paid at the rate of ten and twelve francs apiece by Papa Malgras, a wary picture-dealer. After all, he preferred starvation to making a mere commerce of his art, to manufacturing portraits of tradesmen and their wives; to concocting conventional religious pictures, daubing blinds for restaurants, or sign-boards for midwives. When first he returned to Paris, he had a very large studio in the Impasse des Bourdonnais, but he had moved to the Quai de Bourbon from motives of economy. He lived there like a savage, with an absolute contempt for everything that was not painting. He had fallen out with his family, who disgusted him; he had ceased visiting his aunt, who kept a pork butcher's shop near the Central Markets, because she looked too flourishing and plump. He only nursed a secret grief about the downfall of his mother, who was being eaten out of doors.

Suddenly he shouted to Sandoz: "Will you be kind enough not to tumble to pieces?" But Sandoz declared that he was getting stiff, and jumped from the couch to stretch his legs a bit. They took ten minute's rest, talking meanwhile about many things. Claude felt condescendingly good tempered. When his work went smoothly he became gradually excited and talkative; he, who painted with his teeth set, raging inwardly the moment he felt nature escaping him. Hence his friend had scarcely resumed his

attitude before he went on chattering, without, however, missing a stroke of his brush.

"Going on all right, old boy, isn't it? You look all there in it. Oh, the brutes, I'll just see whether they'll refuse me this time! I am more severe to myself than they are to themselves, I'm sure of it; and when I pass one of my own pictures to myself, it is more serious than if it had passed before all the hanging committees on earth. You know my picture of the markets, with the two urchins tumbling about on a heap of vegetables? Well, I've scratched it out, it didn't come right. I found that I had got hold of a machine,* a deal too heavy for my strength. But, never you fear, I'll take the subject up again some day, when I know better, and I'll take up others, machines which will knock them with surprise. Listen to this, old man: when one of those whipper-snappers has built up a torso like the one over there, he may come and tell me, and we'll have a talk together."

With the end of his brush he pointed to a figure suspended from the wall near the door. It was really magnificent—with a masterly breadth of coloring. By its side there were also some other admirable sketches, a girl's feet, exquisite with delicate truthfulness. In these rare moments of content he felt proud of these few studies, the only ones that satisfied him, that, as it were, foretold the great painter, admirably gifted, but hampered by sudden and inexplicable fits of impotency.

With sabre-like strokes at the velveteen jacket, he violently continued lashing himself with his uncompromising theories that respected nobody.

"They are all so many daubers of penny prints, who have stolen their reputations; a set of idiots or knaves on their knees before public imbecility. Not

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* French artists, playwrights and novelists invariably call their productions "machines."

one among them dares to give the Philistines a slap in the face."

He ceased and withdrew a few steps to judge of the effect of his picture, becoming absorbed in it, as it were, for a moment, and then resuming:

"Yes, nowadays we want something different. What? I don't know exactly. If I did know and could do it I should be clever, indeed. No one else would be in it with me. All I do know and feel is that Delacroix's grand romantic scenes are foundering and splitting up, that Courbet's black painting already has an indoor odor, the mustiness of the studio that the sun never penetrates. We, perhaps, want the sun, the open air, a clear, young style of painting men and things as they appear in the real light. In short, I, myself, am unable to say what our painting should be; the painting that our eyes of to-day should execute and behold."

His voice again fell; he stammered and was unable to explain the formulas of the future rising within him. A great silence fell upon both while Claude continued to work at the velveteen jacket, quivering all the time.

Sandoz had been listening to him without budging from his position. With his back turned, as if speaking in a kind of dream to the wall, he said, slowly:

"No; one does not know, and still we ought to know. But each time a professor wanted to impress a truth upon me, I mistrustfully revolted, reflecting: 'He is deceiving himself or deceiving me.' Their ideas exasperate me. It seems to me that truth is larger, more general. How beautiful would it be if one could devote the whole of one's existence to one single work, into which one would endeavor to put everything, the beasts of the field as well as mankind; in short, a kind of immense ark. And not in the order indicated by manuals of Philosophy, or according to the idiotic

hierarchy on which we pride ourselves, but according to the full current of universal life; a world in which we should be nothing more than an accident, in which the passing cur, even the stones of the roads, would complete and explain us. In sum, the grand whole, without low or high, without clean or unclean, such as it works in reality. Assuredly, it is to science that poets and novelists should address themselves—it is the only possible source to-day. But what are we to take from it? How are we to march with it? The moment I begin to think about that sort of thing I feel that I am floundering! Ah, if I only knew! What a series of books I would hurl at the heads of the crowd!"

He also became silent. The previous winter he had published his first book; a series of mild sketches, brought with him from Plassans, among which only a few rougher notes indicated the mutineer, the lover of truth and power. Since then he was feeling his way, questioning himself in the conflict of the confused ideas throbbing in his brain. At first, smitten with the thought of undertaking something herculean, he had conceived the plan of a genesis of the universe, in three phases or parts; the creation narrated according to science; the history of mankind, supervening at the appointed hour and playing its part in the chain of beings; the future—the beings constantly succeeding each other, and themselves finishing the creation of the world by the endless labor of life. But he had grown lukewarm when confronted by the risky hypotheses of this third phase; and now he was looking out for a more restricted, more human framework, in which, however, he intended that his vast ambition should find room.

"Ah, to be able to see and to paint everything," exclaimed Claude, after a long interval. "To have miles upon miles of walls to cover, to decorate railway stations, markets, municipal offices, everything

that will be built, when architects are no longer idiots. Only strong heads and strong muscles will be wanted, for there will be no lack of subjects. Life such as it runs about the streets, the life of the rich and the poor, in the market places, on the race-courses, on the boulevards, in the populous alleys; every trade being plied, every passion portrayed in full daylight, and the peasants, the beasts of the fields, the landscapes—you shall see it all, unless I am a downright brute. My very hands are itching to do it. Yes! the whole of modern life! Frescoes as high as the Pantheon! A series of canvases big enough to burst the Louvre!"

Whenever they were thrown together, the painter and the author generally reached that state of exaltation. They spurred each other mutually, they went mad with glory; and there was such a burst of youth, such a passion for work about their plans, that they themselves often smiled afterwards at these grand, proud dreams which enlivened them and made them gain in suppleness and strength.

Claude, who had stepped back as far as the wall, remained leaning against it, contemplating his work. Seeing this, Sandoz, broken with fatigue, left the couch and joined him. Then both kept looking without saying a word. The gentleman in the velveteen jacket was entirely roughed out. His hand more advanced than the rest, furnished a pretty fresh patch of flesh color amid the grass, and the dark mass of the coat stood out so vigorously that the small silhouettes in the background, the two little women wrestling in the sunlight, seemed to have retreated further into the luminous quivering of the glade. The principal figure, the recumbent woman, scarcely more than outlined, floated about like some aerial, indistinct being, an eagerly desired Eve sprung from the earth, with her features vaguely smiling and with eyelids closed.

"Just tell me what you are going to call it?" asked Sandoz.

"'In the Open Air,'" replied Claude, somewhat curtly.

The title sounded rather technical to the writer, who, in spite of himself, was sometimes tempted to introduce literature into pictorial art.

"'In the Open Air!' That doesn't suggest anything."

"There is no occasion for it to suggest anything. Some women and a man are reposing in a wood in the sunlight. Does not that suffice? Don't fret, it suffices to produce a masterpiece!"

He flung back his head and muttered between his teeth: "Dash it all! it's very black still. I can't get Delacroix out of my eye, do what I will. And this, the hand, that's Courbet's manner. Every one of us dabs his brush into the romantic sauce now and then. We had too much of it in our youth, we floundered in it up to our very chins. We shall need a jolly good wash to get clear of it altogether."

Sandoz shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of despair. He also bewailed the fact of having been born at the confluence of Hugo and Balzac, as he called it. Nevertheless, Claude remained satisfied, in the happy excitement of a successful sitting. If his friend could give him two or three more Sundays like this, the man in the jacket would be all there. He had enough of him for the present. Both began to joke, for, as a rule, Claude almost killed his models, only letting them go when they were fainting, half dead with fatigue. He himself now very nigh dropped his legs bending under him, his stomach empty. And as the cuckoo clock struck five, he snatched at his crust of bread and devoured it. Thoroughly worn out, he broke it with trembling fingers, and scarcely chewed it, again standing before his picture, pursued by his

idea to such a degree as to be unconscious even that he was eating.

"Five o'clock," said Sandoz, as he stretched himself, with his arms upraised. "Let's go and have dinner. Here comes Dubuche, just in time."

There was a knock at the door, and Dubuche came in. He was a stout young fellow, dark, with regular but heavy features, close-cropped hair, and moustaches already full-blown. He shook hands with both his friends, and stopped before the picture, looking nonplused. In reality, this harum-scarum style of painting upset him, such was the balance of his nature, such his reverence as a steady student for the established formulas of art; and it was only his feeling of friendship which, as a rule, prevented him from criticising. But this time the whole of his being revolted visibly.

"Well, what is it? Dosen't it suit you?" asked Sandoz, who was watching him.

"Yes, oh, yes, it's very well painted—but—"

"Well, speak it out. What is it that ruffles you?"

"Not much; only the gentleman who is fully dressed, amidst those women. People have never seen anything like that."

This sufficed to make both the others wild. Were there not a hundred pictures in the Louvre composed in a similar way? And, besides, if people had never seen anything like it, they would see it then. After all, they didn't care a fig for the public!

Not in the least disconcerted by these violent replies, Dubuche repeated, quietly: "The public will not understand, the public will think it risky, and it is risky."

"You wretched Philistine!" exclaimed Claude, exasperated. "Well, they are making a famous idiot of you at the School of Arts. You weren't such a fool formerly."

These were the current amenities of his two friends

since he attended the School of Arts. He thereupon beat a retreat, rather afraid of the turn the dispute was taking, and saved himself by belaboring the painters in return. Certainly they were perfectly right in one thing, the painters were famous idiots at the School. But as for the architects, that was a different matter. Where was he to get his tuition, if not there? It would not prevent him from having ideas of his own later on. Wherewith he assumed a very revolutionary air.

"All right," said Sandoz, "the moment you apologize, let's go and dine."

But Claude had mechanically taken up a brush and set to work again. Beside the gentleman in the velveteen jacket the figure of the woman now seemed to fade away. Feverish, impatient, he traced a bold outline round her so as to bring her forward.

"Are you coming?"

"In a minute; hang it, what's the hurry? Just let me set this right, and I'll be with you."

Sandoz shook his head and then he said very quietly, lest he should still further annoy him: "You are wrong to worry yourself like that, old man. Yes, you are used up, and have had nothing to eat, and you'll only spoil your work, like you did the other day."

But the painter waved him off with a peevish gesture. It was his old story; he did not know when to leave off; he drugged himself, as it were, with work in his desire for an immediate result, in order to prove to himself that he held his masterpiece at last. Doubts had just driven him to despair in the midst of his delight at having terminated a successful sitting. Had he been right after all in making the velveteen jacket so prominent, and would not he fail after that to find the brilliant note necessary to his other figure? And rather than not know at once he would have dropped down dead on the spot. He feverishly drew

Christine's head from the portfolio where he had hidden it, comparing, and assisting himself by means of this document derived from life.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Dubuche, "where did you get this from? Who is it?"

Claude, startled by the question, did not answer; then, without reflecting, he who usually told them everything, brusquely lied, yielding to a strange fit of compunction, to a feeling of delicacy to keep to himself the adventure of the night.

"Tell us, who is it?" repeated the architect.

"Nobody at all—a model."

"A model! a very young one, isn't she? She is very nice. I wish you would give me her address. Not for myself, but for a sculptor on the lookout for a Psyche. Have you got the address there?"

And Dubuche turned to a corner of the grayish wall where several addresses of models were written in chalk, haphazard. The women especially left their cards in that way, in awkward, childish handwriting. Zoé Piedefer, 7 Rue Campagne-Première, a big brunette who was getting flabby, had scrawled her sign manual right across those of little Flore Beauchamp, 32 Rue de Laval, and of Judith Vaquez, 69 Rue du Rocher, a Jewess, both tolerably fresh, but too thin.

"I say, have you got the address?" resumed Dubuche.

Then Claude flew into a passion. "Don't pester me! I don't know and don't care. You're a nuisance with your worrying, just when a fellow wants to work."

Sandoz had not said a word. Surprised at first, he had only smiled. He had more tact than Dubuche, so he merely gave him an intelligent nod, and then they began to chaff. They begged his pardon; the moment he wanted to keep her for his personal use, they would not ask him to lend her. Ha! ha! the scamp went in for pretty girls! And where had he

picked that one up? In some petty music-hall at Montmarte, or on the flagstones of the Place Maubert?

More and more embarrassed, Claude was getting fidgety at last. "What a couple of idiots you are! If you only knew what asses you are making of yourselves! That'll do. You really make me sorry for both of you."

His voice sounded so stern that both became silent immediately, while he, after having once more scratched out the woman's head, drew it anew and began to paint it after Christine's, but with a feverish, unsteady touch that went at random.

"Just give me another ten minutes, will you?" he repeated. "I will rough in the shoulders to be ready for to-morrow, and then we'll go down."

Sandoz and Dubuche, knowing that it was of no use to prevent him from killing himself like this, resigned themselves. The latter lighted his pipe, and flung himself on the couch. He was the only one of the three that smoked; the other two had never taken kindly to tobacco, always feeling qualmish after a strong cigar. Then, when he was stretched on his back, his eyes mechanically watching the clouds of smoke he blew out, he began to talk about himself.

"All the same, I'm lucky. There are so many of us scouring the town every day without getting the smallest job. The day before yesterday I discovered an architect who works for a large contractor. You can have no idea of such an ignoramus of an architect—a downright numskull, incapable even of tracing a plan. He gives me twenty-five sous an hour, and I set his houses upright for him. Just in time, too, for my mother sent me word that she was quite cleared out. Poor mother, what a lot of money I have to refund her!"

As Dubuche was evidently talking to himself, chewing the cud of his everyday thoughts, his constant

preoccupation of making a rapid fortune, Sandoz did not even take the trouble to listen to him. He had opened the little window, and seated himself on a level with the roof, feeling oppressed by the heat in the studio. But all at once he interrupted the architect.

"I say, are you coming to dinner on Thursday? All the fellows will be there—Fagerolles, Mahoudeau, Jory, Gagnière."

Every Thursday quite a band met at Sandoz's, friends from Plassans and others known in Paris, revolutionaries to a man, and all animated by the same passionate love of art.

"Next Thursday? No, I think not," answered Dubuche. "I am obliged to go to a dance at a family's I know."

"Where you expect to get hold of a dowry, I suppose?"

"Well, it wouldn't be such a bad spec."

He shook the ashes from his pipe in his left palm, and then suddenly raising his voice:

"I almost forgot. I have had a letter from Pouillaud."

"You, too!—well, I think he's pretty well done for, Pouillaud. Another good fellow gone wrong."

"Why gone wrong? He'll succeed his father; he'll spend his money quietly down there. He writes rationally enough. I always said he'd show us a thing or two, for all his practical jokes. Ah! that beast of a Pouillaud."

Sandoz, furious, was about to reply, when a despairing oath from Claude stopped him. The latter had not opened his lips since he had so obstinately resumed his work. To all appearances he had not even listened.

"Curse it, I have failed again! Decidedly I'm a brute, I shall never do anything." And in a fit of mad rage he wanted to rush at his picture to dash

his fist through it. His friends had to hold him back. Why, it was simply childish to get into such a passion. Would matters be improved when he had the mortal regret of having destroyed his work? Still shaking, he relapsed into silence, and looked at the canvas with an ardent and fixed gaze, blazing with the horrible agony of his powerlessness. He could produce nothing clear or lifelike; the woman's breast was growing impasted with heavy coloring; the adored flesh which, in his dream, should have glowed, he was simply begriming it; he did not even succeed in getting the figure in the right focus. What the devil was the matter with his brain that he heard it bursting asunder, as it were, in his vain effort? Was he losing his sight that he was no longer able to see correctly? Were his hands no longer his that they refused to obey him? And he continued to wind himself up, irritated by the hereditary mystery, which sometimes so greatly assisted his creative powers, but which, at others, reduced him to a state of sterile despair, such as to make him forget the first elements of drawing. And to feel giddy with vertiginous nausea, and yet to stand there still with the fury to create, when the power to do so fled with everything else, when everything seemed to founder around him, the pride of work, the dreamt-of glory, the whole of his existence!

"Look here, old boy," said Sandoz at last, "we don't want to worry you, but it's half-past six, and we are starving. Be reasonable, and come down with us."

Claude was cleaning a corner of his palette. Then he emptied some more tubes on it, and replied by one single word, in a voice like thunder: "No!"

For the next ten minutes no one said a word; the painter beside himself, wrestling with his picture, his two friends, sorry and anxious at this crisis, which

they did not know how to allay. Then as there came a knock at the door, the architect went to open it.

"Hallo, it's Papa Malgras!"

The picture-dealer was a thick-set individual, with close-cropt, brush-like, white hair, and a red, splotchy face. He was wrapt in a very dirty old green coat, that made him look like an untidy cabman. In a husky voice, like a drunkard's, he said: "I happened to pass along the quay, on the other side of the way, and I saw this gentleman at the window. So I came up."

Claude's continued silence made him stop short. The painter had turned to his picture with an impatient gesture. Not that this silence in any way embarrassed the new comer, who, standing straight on his solid legs and feeling at home, carefully examined the new picture with his blood-shot eyes. Without the least embarrassment, he passed judgment upon it in one phrase, half ironic, half affectionate: "There's a machine."

And seeing that no one said anything, he began to stroll quietly around the studio, looking along the walls.

Papa Malgras, beneath a thick layer of grease and grime, was a very cute customer, with taste and scent for good painting. He never wasted his time or lost his way among mere mediocre daubers; he went straight, as if from instinct, to individualists, whose talent was contested still, but whose future fame his flaming drunkard's nose smelt from afar. Added to this he was a ferocious hand at bargaining, and displayed all the cunning of a savage in his efforts to secure, for a mere song, the pictures he coveted. True, he himself was satisfied with very honest profits, twenty per cent., thirty at the most. He based his calculations on the quick turning over of his small capital, never purchasing in the morning without

knowing where to dispose of this purchase at night. As a superb liar, moreover, he was without his equal.

Stuck close to the door, before the studies painted at the Boutin studio, he contemplated them in silence for a few moments, his eyes glistening with the enjoyment of a connoisseur, though trying to temper it beneath his heavy eyelids. Assuredly there was a great deal of talent and sentiment of life about this big crazy fellow, who wasted his time painting immense stretches of canvas. But there was no sale for that kind of stuff, and he had already made his choice—a tiny sketch, a nook of the country round Plassans, delicate and violent at once, which he pretended not to notice. At last he drew near, and said in an off-hand way:

"What's this? Ah! yes, I know, one of the things you brought back with you from the South. It's too crude. I still have the two I bought of you."

And he went on in mellow, long-winded phrases: "You'll perhaps not believe me, Monsieur Lantier, but that sort of thing doesn't sell at all, not at all. I've a set of rooms full of them. I'm always afraid of smashing something when I turn round. I can't go on like that, honor bright; I shall have to go into liquidation, and I shall end my days in the hospital. You know me, eh? My heart is bigger than my pocket, and there's nothing I like better than to oblige young men of talent like yourself. Oh, for the matter of that, you've got talent, and I keep on telling them so—nay, shouting it to them—but what's the good? They won't bite, they won't bite!"

He was trying the emotional dodge, then, with the spirit of a man about to do something rash: "Well, it sha'n't be said that I came in to waste your time. What do you want for that sketch?"

Claude, still irritated, was painting nervously. He

answered in a curt tone, without turning his head: "Twenty francs."

"Nonsense! Twenty francs! You must be mad! You sold me the others at ten francs apiece—and to-day I won't give a copper more than eight francs!"

As a rule, the painter closed with him at once, ashamed and humbled at this miserable chaffering, glad also to get a little money now and then. But this time he was obstinate, and took to insulting the picture-dealer, who, giving tit-for-tat, all at once dropped the formal "you" to assume the glib "thou," denied him all talent, overwhelmed him with invective, and taxed him with ingratitude. Meanwhile he had taken from his pocket, one by one, three five-franc pieces, which, from a distance, he flung—as if playing at chuck-farthing—upon the table where they rattled among the crockery.

"One, two, three—not one more, dost hear?—for there is already one too many, and I'll take care to get it back; I'll deduct it from something else of yours, as I live. Fifteen francs for that! Thou art wrong, my lad, and thou wilt be sorry for this dirty trick."

Exhausted, Claude let him take down the little canvas, which disappeared as if by magic in the capacious green coat. Had it dropped into a special pocket, or was it still reposing on Papa Malgras' ample chest? Not the slightest protuberance indicated its whereabouts.

Having accomplished his stroke, Papa Malgras abruptly calmed, went towards the door. But he suddenly changed his mind and came back. "Just listen, Lantier," he said, in the honeyest of tones, "I want a lobster painted. You really owe me that much after having skinned me. I'll bring it to you, you'll paint me a bit of still life from it, and keep it for your pains. You can eat it with your friends. It's settled, isn't it?"

At this proposal Sandoz and Dubuche, who up till now had listened inquisitively, burst into such mirthful laughter that the picture-dealer himself became gay. Those confounded painters, they did themselves no good, they simply starved. What would become of the lazy beggars, if he, Papa Malgras, didn't bring them a leg of mutton now and then, or a nice fresh plaice, or a lobster, with its garnish of parsley?

"You'll paint me my lobster, eh, Lantier? Much obliged."

And he stuck himself anew before the large roughed-out canvas, examining it with a smile of mingled derision and admiration. And at last he went off, repeating: "There's a machine."

Claude wanted to take up his palette and brushes again. But his legs refused their service; his arms fell to his side, stiff, and as if pinioned there by some occult force. In the intense, melancholy silence that had followed the din of the dispute he staggered, distracted, bereft of sight before his shapeless work.

"I'm done for, I'm done for!" he gasped. "That swine has finished me off!"

The clock had just struck seven; he had been at work for eight mortal hours without tasting anything but a crust of bread, without taking a moment's rest, on his legs, shaken by feverish excitement. And now the sun was setting, a shadow began to darken the studio where the twilight assumed a horrid, melancholy air. When the light went down like this on the crisis of a bad day's work, it seemed to Claude as if the sun would never rise again, after having carried life, the jubilant joy of color, away with him.

"Come," implored Sandoz, gentle and tender in his brotherly compassion. "Come, there's a good fellow."

Even Dubuche added: "You'll see more clearly into it to-morrow. Come and dine."

For a moment Claude refused to surrender. He

stood rooted to the spot, deaf to their friendly voices, morose in his obstinacy.

What did he want to do, now that his tired fingers were no longer able to grasp the brush? He did not know, but, however powerless he might be, he was gnawed by the mad desire to go on working still, to create in spite of everything. Even if he did nothing, he would at least stay, he would not vacate the spot. Then he made up his mind, shaken as if by a big sob. He had firmly clutched hold of a very broad palette-knife, and with one deep, slow sweep he obliterated the woman's head and bosom. It was a veritable murder, a pounding of human flesh as it were; the whole disappeared in a murky, muddy mash. By the side of the gentleman in the dark jacket, amidst the bright verdure, where the two little wrestlers so lightly tinted were disporting themselves, there was no longer aught of the headless and breastless woman but a mutilated trunk, a vague cadaverous stump, an indistinct, lifeless patch of dreamy flesh.

Sandoz and Dubuche were already descending the stairs with a great clatter, and Claude followed them, fleeing his work, in agony at having to leave it thus disfigured by a gaping gash.

CHAPTER III.

BOHEMIAN LIFE.

THE beginning of the week was disastrous to Claude. He had relapsed into one of those periods of self-doubt that made him hate painting, with the hatred of a lover betrayed, who overwhelms the faithless one with insults although tortured by the uncontrollable want of worshipping her. So on the Thursday, after three frightful days of fruitless and solitary struggle, he left home as early as eight in the morning, banging his door violently, and so sick at heart with himself that he swore never to take up a brush again. When unhinged by one of these crises there was but one remedy—all oblivion of himself; to look up some comrades with whom to quarrel; above all, to walk about, to trudge across Paris, until the heat and the smell of the daily battle on her flagstones put heart into him again.

On that day, like on every Thursday, he was to dine at Sandoz's in company with other friends. But what was he to do until this evening? The idea of remaining by herself, of eating his heart out, disgusted him. He would have gone straight to his friend, but for knowing that the latter must be at his office. Then the thought of Dubuche came to him, but he hesitated, for their old friendship had lately been cooling down. He no longer felt the fraternity of earlier times of effort between them. He guessed that Dubuche lacked intelligence, that he was covertly hostile and was occupied with ambi-

tions differing from his own. However he, Claude, must go somewhere. So he made up his mind, and repaired to the Rue Jacob, where the architect rented a small room on the sixth floor of a melancholy-looking house.

Claude was already on the landing of the second floor, when the doorkeeper, calling him back, snappishly told him that M. Dubuche was not at home, that, in fact, he had stayed out all night. He slowly descended the stairs and found himself in the street, stupefied, as it were, by so prodigious an event as an escapade on the part of Dubuche. It was a piece of inconceivable bad luck. For a moment he strolled along aimlessly, overcome by this last blow. But as he turned into the Rue de Seine, not knowing which way to go, he suddenly recollected what his friend had told him about a certain night spent at the Dequersonnière studio, a night of terrible hard work, the eve of the day on which the pupils' prize drawings were to be deposited at the School of Arts. At once he walked towards the Rue du Four, where the studio was situated. So far he had carefully abstained from going there to fetch his friend Dubuche, from fear of the yells with which the profane were greeted. But now he made straight for it without flinching, his timidity giving way so thoroughly before the anguish of being alone that he felt ready to undergo any amount of insult could he but win a companion for his wretchedness.

The studio was situated in the narrowest part of the Rue du Four, at the far end of a decrepit, tumble-down tenement. He had to cross two ill-smelling court-yards to reach a third, the width of which was taken up by a big closed shed, a vast outhouse made of deal boards and plastered over, that had once served as the workshop of a packing-case-maker. From the outside, through the four large windows, the panes of

which were bedaubed with a coating of white lead, nothing could be seen but the bare whitewashed ceiling.

Having pushed open the door, Claude remained motionless on the threshold. The vast structure stretched away, with its four long tables, ranged lengthwise to the windows, double tables, very wide, both sides occupied by swarms of students, and littered with moist sponges, paint saucers, iron candlesticks, water bowls, wooden boxes, in which each pupil kept his white linen blouse, his compasses and his colors. In one corner, the stove, neglected since last winter, was rusting by the side of a pile of coke that had not been swept away; while at the other end, a miniature iron cistern with its tap was suspended between two towels. And amidst the bare untidiness of this shed, the walls especially attracted notice, displaying up above a number of plaster casts ranged in hap-hazard fashion on shelves, and disappearing lower down behind forests of T squares and bevels, behind heaps of drawing-boards, tied together with webbing straps. Bit by bit, such parts of the walls as had remained unoccupied had become covered with inscriptions, with drawings, a constantly rising flotsam and jetsam, flung there like on the margin of an ever-open book. There were caricatures of the students themselves, profiles of common things, witticisms to make a gendarme turn pale; epigrammatic sentences, additions, addresses, the whole dominated by this one laconic line, a summary of opinion, as it were, written in big characters, and occupying the most prominent place: "On the 7th of June, Gorfu said that he didn't care a hang for Rome, Signed, Godemard."

The painter was greeted with a growl, the growl of wild beasts disturbed in their lair. What kept him motionless was the aspect of this place on the morning of the "truck night," as the architects termed this crucial night of labor. Since the previous evening, the whole

of the studio—about sixty pupils—had been shut up there; those who had no plans to exhibit—"the niggers," as they were called—helping the others, the competitors who were behind time and obliged to knock down the work of a week in a dozen hours. Already at midnight they had stuffed themselves with brawn, saveloys and similar commodities, washed down with cheap wine. Towards one o'clock they had sent for "three ladies," from an adjacent establishment in guise of dessert. And without the work abating, the feast had turned into a Roman orgie, amidst the smoke from the pipes. On the floor there remained of it all a litter of greasy paper, broken bottles; while the atmosphere retained the acrid smell of candles burnt in the socket, mingled with the effluvia of the sausages, and the cheap bluish wine. One of the windows had just been opened, but only slightly, as there was no need to make the Philistines opposite wiser than they were.

And now many voices savagely yelled: "Turn him out! Oh, that mug! What does he want, that guy? Turn him out, turn him out!"

For a moment Claude, quite dazed, staggered beneath the violence of the onslaught. But the epithets became stronger still, the acme of elegance, even for the more refined among them, being to rival in sharp language. He was, nevertheless, recovering and beginning to answer, when Dubuche recognized him. The latter turned crimson, for he detested this kind of adventures. He was ashamed of his friend, and rushed towards him, amidst the jeers, which were now levelled at himself.

"What, is it you?" he gasped. "I told you never to come in. Just wait for me a minute in the yard."

At that moment, Claude, who was stepping back, narrowly escaped being knocked down by a little hand-truck brought up at a gallop by two full-bearded strong fellows. It was from this truck that the night of heavy toil derived its name; and for the last week the

students behindhand with their work, on account of the petty paid jobs outside, repeated the cry, "I'm in the truck, to be sure!" The moment the vehicle appeared, a clamor arose. It was a quarter to nine, barely time to reach the School of Arts. A helter-skelter rush emptied the studio; every one brought out his chases, amidst a general jostling; those who obstinately wished to give a finishing touch were knocked about and carried away with their comrades. In less than five minutes all the frames were piled upon the truck, and the two bearded fellows, the most recent additions to the studio, harnessed themselves to it like cattle, drawing with all their might, while the rest, vociferating, pushed from behind. It was like the giving way of a sluice-gate, the three yards were crossed with a torrential crash, the street invaded, flooded by the howling crowd.

Claude, nevertheless, had set up running by the side of Dubuche, who came at the fag end, very vexed at not having had a quarter of an hour longer to more carefully finish a tinted drawing.

"What are you going to do afterwards?" asked Claude.

"Oh! I've errands which will take up my whole day."

The painter was grieved to see that even this friend escaped him. "All right; in that case I leave you. Shall you be at Sandoz's to-night?"

"Yes, I think so, unless I'm kept to dinner elsewhere."

Both were getting out of breath. The band, without slackening their pace, purposely took the longest way round for the pleasure of prolonging their uproar.

After going down the Rue du Four, they dashed across the Place Gozlin and swept into the Rue de L'Echaudé. Heading the procession, the truck, drawn and pushed more vigorously, rebounded over the

uneven paving stones, amid the lamentable dancing of the frames with which it was laden. Its escort madly galloped along, compelling the passers-by to stick themselves against the houses unless they wished to be knocked down, while the shop-keepers, standing open-mouthed on their doorsteps, believed in a revolution. The whole neighborhood was upset. In the Rue Jacob, such was the rush, so frightful the yells, that several house shutters were pulled to. As the Rue Bonaparte was, at last, being reached, a tall fair fellow thought it a good joke to catch hold of a little servant girl, standing bewildered on the pavement, and drag her along—a wisp of straw in a torrent.

"Well," said Claude, "good-bye then, I'll see you to-night."

"Yes, to-night."

The painter, out of breath, had stopped at the corner of the Rue des Beaux Arts. The court gates of the school stood wide open in front of him. The procession plunged into the yard.

When he had breathed heavily for a moment, he retraced his steps to the Rue de Seine. His bad luck was increasing; it seemed ordained that he should not be able to beguile a chum from work that morning. So he went up the street, and slowly walked along as far as the Place du Pantheon, without any definite purpose. Then the idea struck him that he might look into the Mairie for all that, if only to shake hands with Sandoz. It would, at any rate, be ten minutes well spent. But he positively gasped when told that M. Sandoz had asked for a day off to attend a funeral. However, he knew the trick of old. His friend always found the same pretext when he wanted to do a good day's work at home. He had already made up his mind to join him, when a feeling of artistic brotherhood, the scruple of the honest worker, made him stop; it would be a crime to go and disturb the good fellow,

to take him the discouragement born of a rebellious task, at the very moment when he was, no doubt, manfully accomplishing his work.

After that Claude had to resign himself to his fate. He dragged his black melancholy along the quays until mid-day, his head so heavy, so throbbing with the constant thought of his lack of power, as only to behold the beloved horizons of the Seine through a mist. Then he found himself once more in the Rue de la Femme-sans-Tête, where he breakfasted at Gomard's, a wine shop, the sign of which, "The Dog of Montargis," inspired him with interest. Stonemasons, in their working blouses, bespattered with mortar, were there at table, and like them, and with them, he ate his eight sous' "ordinary"—beef-tea in a bowl, in which he soaked some bread, a slice of boiled beef garnished with haricot beans and served up on a plate still damp with dishwater. It was still too good he thought for a brute unable to earn his bread. When his work miscarried, he undervalued himself, ranked himself lower than the common workman, whose sinewy arms could at least perform their labor. For an hour he lingered, brutifying himself by listening to the conversation at the tables around him. Once outside he slowly resumed his walk at hap-hazard.

When on the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, an idea made him quicken his pace. Why had he not thought of Fagerolles? Fagerolles was a nice fellow, gay, and by no means a fool, albeit that he studied at the School of Arts. One could talk with him, even when he defended bad painting. If he had breakfasted at his father's, Rue Vieille-du-Temple, he must certainly still be there.

On entering the narrow street, Claude felt a sensation of refreshing coolness steal over him. It had become very warm, and moisture rose from the pavement, which, notwithstanding the bright sky, remained

damp and greasy beneath the constant trampling of the passers-by. Every minute, when a shove obliged him to leave the pavement, he was in danger of being knocked down by wains or vans. Still the street amused him, with its straggling houses out of line, its flat frontages chequered with signboards up to the very eaves, and pierced with small windows, whence issued the buzzing of every handiwork capable of being carried on at home. In one of its narrowest parts a small newspaper shop made him stop. It was betwixt a hairdresser's and a tripeseller's, and had an outdoor display of idiotic prints, romantic balderdash mixed with filth fit for a barrack-room. Stuck in front of the wood-cuts, a lank hobbledehoy was lost in reverie, while two girls of the genus gamine nudged each other and jeered. He felt inclined to slap all their faces, but he hurried across the road, for Fagerolles' house just happened to be opposite. It was an old dark tenement, standing forward from the others, and bespattered like them with the mud from the gutters. And as an omnibus was coming up, he had barely time to jump on to the pavement, there reduced to a simple ledge; the wheels brushed against his chest, and he was drenched to his knees.

M. Fagerolles, senior, a manufacturer of artistic zinc-work, had his workshops on the ground floor, and having converted the two large front rooms on the first floor into a warehouse, he occupied a small, dark, cellar-like apartment overlooking the court-yard. It was there that his son Henri had grown up like a true specimen of the flora of the Paris streets, at the edge of the narrow pavement constantly impinged by the omnibus wheels, always soddened by the gutter, opposite the print and newspaper shop, flanked by the barber's and tripeseller's. At first his father had made an ornamental draughtsman of him for his personal use. But when the lad had developed a higher

ambition, taking to painting proper and talking about the School of Arts, there had been quarrels, blows, a series of falling-outs and reconciliations. Even now, although Henri had already achieved some first successes, the manufacturer of artistic zinc-work, while resigned to letting him have his will, treated him harshly, like a lad who was spoiling his career.

After shaking off the water, Claude went up the entrance, a deep archway, to a yard, where the daylight showed greenish, and which was pervaded by a dank, musty smell, like that at the bottom of a tank. There was an overhanging roofing of glass and iron at the foot of the staircase, which was a wide one, with a wrought-iron railing, eaten with rust. When the painter passed the warehouse on the first floor, he noticed through a glass door M. Fagerolles examining some patterns. Wishing to be polite, he entered, in spite of his artistic disgust at all this zinc, colored like bronze, of all the frightful mendacious prettiness of imitation art.

"Good-morning, monsieur. Is Henri still at home?"

The manufacturer, a stout, sallow-looking man, drew himself straight amidst his nosegay vases and statuettes. He held a new model of a thermometer, a juggling girl, crouching down and balancing the glass tube on her nose.

"Henri did not come in to breakfast," he answered dryly.

This cool reception troubled Claude. "Ah! he did not come back to breakfast! I beg pardon for having disturbed you. Good-day, monsieur."

"Good-day."

Once more outside, Claude began to swear to himself. His ill luck was complete, Fagerolles escaped him also. He even felt vexed with himself for having gone there, and having taken an interest in this old, picturesque street; he was infuriated by the romantic

gangrene that ever sprouted afresh within him, do what he would. It was his malady, perhaps, the false principle which he sometimes felt like a bar across his skull. And when he had reached the quays again, he had a thought of going home to see whether his picture was really very bad. But the mere idea made him tremble all over. His studio seemed a spot of horrors, in which he could no more continue to live, as if he had left the corpse of some beloved being there. No, no; to climb up the three flights, to open the door, to shut himself up face to face "with that," would have needed strength beyond his courage. He crossed the Seine and went straight along the Rue St. Jacques. Come what might, he felt too wretched; and he was going to the Rue d'Enfer to turn Sandoz from his work.

The small lodging on the fourth floor consisted of a dining-room, a bed-room, and a strip of kitchen. It was occupied by the son, while the mother, disabled by paralysis, had on the other side of the landing one single room where she lived in morose and voluntary solitude. The street was a deserted one, the windows of the lodging overlooked the gardens of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, above which rose the rounded crest of a lofty tree, and the square tower of St. Jacques-du-Haut-Pas.

Claude found Sandoz in his room, bending over his table, absorbed in a page of manuscript.

"I am disturbing you?" said Claude.

"Not at all. I have been working since this morning, and I've enough of it. I've been killing myself for this hour on a sentence that reads anyhow, and which has worried me throughout my breakfast."

The painter made a gesture of despair, and the other, seeing him so gloomy, understood at once.

"You don't get on either, eh? Well, let's go out.

A sharp walk will take a little of the rust off us. Shall we go?"

As he was passing the kitchen, an old woman stopped him. It was his charwoman, who, as a rule, came only for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. On Thursdays, however, she remained the whole of the afternoon to look after the dinner.

"Then it's decided, monsieur?" she asked. "It's to be a piece of skate and a leg of mutton, with potatoes."

"Yes, if you like."

"For how many am I to lay the cloth?"

"Oh! as for that, one never knows. Lay for five, at any rate; we'll see afterwards. Dinner at seven, eh? We'll try to be home by then."

When they were on the landing, Sandoz, leaving Claude to wait for him, stole into his mother's room. When he came out again, in the same discreet, affectionate manner, they both went down-stairs in silence. Outside, having sniffed right and left as if to see which way the wind blew, they ended by going up the street, reached the Place de l'Observatoire, and turned into the Boulevard du Montparnasse. It was their ordinary promenade, they reached the spot by instinct, being fond of the wide expanse of the outer boulevards, where they could roam and lounge at their ease. They continued silent, their heads feeling heavy still, but the comfort of being together gradually stole over them. It was only when they were opposite the Western Railway Station that Sandoz spoke.

"I say, suppose we go to Mahoudeau's to see how he's getting on with his big machine. I know that he has given 'his gods and saints' the slip to-day."

"All right," answered Claude. "Let's go to Mahoudeau's."

They at once turned into the Rue du Cherche-Midi. Mahoudeau, a sculptor, had rented, at a few steps from

the boulevard, the shop of a fruiterer who had failed in business, and he had installed himself therein, contenting himself with covering the windows with a layer of whitening. At this point, the streets, wide and deserted, has a quiet provincial air, mingled with an ecclesiastical touch; large gateways stand wide open, showing a succession of deep and roomy yards; from a cowkeeper's establishment comes a tepid, plungent smell of litter; the dead wall of a convent stretches away for a goodly length. It was between this convent and a herbalist's that the shop transformed into a studio was situated. It still bore the inscription, "Fruiterer," in large yellow letters.

Claude and Sandoz narrowly missed being blinded by some little girls playing at skipping rope. On the side pavement sat several families, whose barricades of chairs compelled the friends to step down on to the roadway. However, they were drawing nigh, when the sight of the herbalist's shop delayed them for a moment. Between its windows decked with enemas, bandages, and all sorts of appliances for private and delicate use, beneath the dried herbs hanging above the doorway, whence issued a constant aromatic smell, a thin, dark woman stood taking stock of them, while behind her, in the shadow, appeared the indistinct profile of a little sickly-looking man, who was expectorating his lungs. The friends nudged each other's elbows, their eyes lighting up with bantering mirth; and then they turned the handle of Mahoudeau's door.

The tolerably roomy shop was almost entirely taken up by a mass of clay, a colossal Bacchante, half-thrown back upon a rock. The wooden stays bent beneath the weight of the still shapeless mass, of which nothing could as yet be distinguished but the bust of a giantess and a pair of thighs like towers. Some water had been spilt on the floor, some muddy buckets straggled here and there; while a heap of

moistened plaster was lying in a corner. On the fruit and vegetable shelves, left behind by the late tenant, some casts from the antique were scattered about, covered with a tracery of cinder-like dust gradually collected there. A wash-house kind of dampness, a stale smell of moist clay, rose from the floor. And this wretchedness of the sculptor's studio, the dirt attendant upon the profession, were made still more conspicuous by the wan light from the besmeared shop windows.

"What! is it you?" shouted Mahoudeau, seated before his female figure and smoking a pipe.

He was small, thin, with a bony face already wrinkled at twenty-seven. His black, mane-like hair was entangled over his very low forehead, and his sallow mask, ugly almost to ferociousness, was lighted up by a pair of childish eyes, bright and expressionless, which smiled with winning simplicity. The son of a stonemason of Plassans, he had attained great success at the local art competitions, after which he had come to Paris as the town laureate, with an allowance of eight hundred francs per annum, for a period of four years. In the capital, however, he had found himself at sea, defenceless, failing in his competitions at the School of Arts, and merely spending his allowance to no purpose; so that at the end of his term he had been obliged, in order to live, to enter the employ of a dealer in church statues, at whose place, for ten hours a day, he scraped away at St. Josephs, St. Rochs, Mary Magdalens, in fact, at all the saints of the calendar. For the last six months, however, his ambition had revived, when he found himself again with his comrades from Provençe, the eldest of whom he was, fellows whom he had known at Geraud's, a boarding school for small boys, who had since grown into savage revolutionaries. And now, in his constant commerce with impassioned artists, who troubled his brain

with their wild theories, his ambition aimed at the gigantic.

"The devil!" said Claude, "there's a lump."

The sculptor, delighted, gave a long pull at his pipe, and blew a cloud of smoke.

"Eh, isn't it? I am going to give them some flesh, and living flesh, too; not bladders of lard as they turn out."

"It's a woman bathing, isn't it?" asked Sandoz.

"No; I shall put some vine leaves around her head. A Bacchante, you understand."

At this Claude flew into a violent passion.

"A Bacchante? Do you want to make fools of people? Does such a thing as a Bacchante exist? A vintaging girl, eh? And quite modern, curse it all! I know very well that she's half-clad. So let her be a peasant woman who is disrobing herself. And that must be conveyed so that every one can realize it; she must live."

Mahoudeau, taken aback, listened, trembling. He was afraid of Claude, and bent to his ideal of strength and truth. So he improved upon the painter's idea.

"Yes, yes, that's what I meant to say—a vintaging girl. And you'll see whether there's the stamp of woman about her."

At that moment, Sandoz, who had been making the tour of the enormous block of clay, exclaimed: "Ah! that sneak of a Chaîne is here."

In fact, behind the pile, Chaîne, a burly fellow, was quietly painting away, copying the fireless rusty stove on a small canvas. One realized that he was a peasant by his heavy, deliberate manner, his bull neck, tanned and hardened like a hide. His only noticeable feature was his forehead, displaying the bump of obstinacy; for his nose was so small as to be lost between his red cheeks, while a stiff beard hid his powerful jaws. He came from Saint Firmin, about six miles from Plas-

sans, a village where he had been a cow-boy, until he drew for the conscription; and his misfortune sprang from the enthusiasm that a gentleman of the neighborhood showed for the walking-stick handles which he carved out of roots with his knife. From that moment, having become the rustic genius, the embryo great man of the local connoisseur, who happened to be on the museum committee, assisted by him, adulated, driven crazy with hopes, he had successively missed everything—his studies, his competitions and the town's purse. He had, nevertheless, started for Paris, after having worried his father, a wretched peasant, into forestalling his heritage, a thousand francs, on which he reckoned to live for a twelvemonth while awaiting the promised victory. The thousand francs had lasted eighteen months. Then, as he had only twenty francs left, he had taken up his quarters with his friend, Mahoudeau. They both slept in the same bed, in the dark back shop; they both cut in turn from the same loaf of bread—of which they bought sufficient for a fortnight at the time, so that it might get very hard and that they might not be able to eat much of it.

"I say, Chaîne," continued Sandoz, "your stove is really awfully exact."

Chaîne, without answering, gave a chuckle of triumph which lighted up his face like a sunbeam. By a crowning stroke of imbecility, and to complete the adventure, his protector's advice had launched him into painting, despite the taste he showed for wood carving. And he painted like a whitewasher, mixing his colors like a hodman mixes his mortar, and managing to make the clearest and brightest of them muddy. His triumph consisted, however, in combining exactness with indexterity; he showed all the naive minuteness of the primitive painters; in fact his mind, barely disengaged from the clods, delighted in petty

details. The stove, with its perspective all awry, was tame and precise, its color dingy like mire.

Claude approached, and was taken with compassion at sight of this painting, and he, so harsh towards bad painters as a rule, found a word of praise.

"Ah! one can't say that you are a humbug; you, at any rate, paint as you feel. Very good, indeed."

Meanwhile the door of the shop had opened, and a good-looking, fair fellow, quick and gay, with a big pink nose, and large, blue, short-sighted eyes, entered, shouting:

"I say, that herbalist woman next door is there accosting people. There's an ugly mug."

They all laughed, except Mahoudeau, who seemed very much embarrassed.

"Jory, the King of Blunderers," declared Sandoz, shaking hands with the new comer.

"Why? What? Belongs to Mahoudeau? I didn't know," resumed Jory, when he had at length grasped the situation. "Well, what's the odds? There's no refusing a woman."

"As for you," the sculptor merely said, "you have tumbled on the finger nails of yours again. She has dug out a bit of your cheek."

They all burst out laughing anew, while Jory in his turn became red. In fact, his face was scratched: there were even two deep gashes. The son of a magistrate of Plassans, whom he drove crazy by his adventures, the adventures of a handsome man, he had put the crowning stroke to his profligacy by running away with a music-hall singer under the pretext of going to Paris to follow the literary profession. During the six months that they had been camping together in a shady hotel in the Quartier Latin, the girl had almost flayed him alive. And so he always had some fresh scar to show—a bloody nose, a torn ear, a damaged eye, swollen and blackened.

At last they all began to talk, with the exception of Chaîne, who continued to paint with his determined look of an ox at the plough. Jory had at once gone into ecstacies over the roughly indicated figure of the vintaging girl. He worshipped fat women. His first writings in his native town had been Parnassian sonnets celebrating a handsome pork-butcheress who had troubled his nights' rest. In Paris—where he had fallen in with the band—he had taken to art criticism, and for a livelihood he wrote articles for twenty frances apiece in a small, slashing paper, called "The Drummer." Indeed, of these articles, a study on a picture of Claude's, exhibited at Papa Malgras', had just caused a tremendous scandal; for Jory had therein sacrificed all the painters, appreciated by the public, to his friend, whom he had set up as the leader of a new school, the school of the "open air." Very gay and very practical, at heart he did not care a rap about anything that did not concern his own pleasures; he simply repeated the theories he heard enunciated by his friends. "I Say, Mahoudeau," he shouted, "you shall have your article: I'll launch your woman!" Then suddenly changing the conversation: "By the way," he said, "my miserly father has apologized. He is afraid I shall drag his name through the mud, so he sends me a hundred francs a month. I am paying my debts."

"Debts! You are too careful to have any," muttered Sandoz, with a smile.

In fact, Jory displayed a hereditary tightness of fist which amused his friends. He managed to lead a profligate life without money and without debts; and this innate science of indulging himself on the cheap was allied to constant duplicity, to a necessity for lying, which he had contracted in the devout sphere of his family, where his anxiety to hide his vices had made him lie about everything at all hours,

and even without occasion. He now gave a superb reply, the cry of a sage knowing life in all its phases:

"Oh, you fellows, you don't know the worth of money."

This time he was hooted. What a Philistine! And the invective was continuing, when some light taps on one of the window panes suddenly made the din cease.

"She is really becoming a downright nuisance," said Mahoudeau, with a gesture of annoyance.

"Eh! Who is it? The herbalist woman?" asked Jory. "Let her come in; it will be great fun."

The door, indeed, had already been opened, and Mahoudeau's neighbor, Madame Jabouille, or Mathilde, as she was familiarly called, appeared on the threshold. She was about thirty, with a flat face, horribly emaciated, and passionate eyes, the lids of which had a bluey tinge as if bruised. It was said that the clergy had made the match between her and little Jabouille, whose business was then flourishing, thanks to the pious custom of the neighborhood. The truth was that one sometimes saw vague shadows of black cassocks stealthily crossing the mysterious shop, to which the aromatic herbs imparted the scent of incense. Amid the sale of syringes, a kind of cloistral quietude, a priestly unction, pervaded the place; and the devotees who came in spoke low, as if in the confessional, and going off with downcast eyes. Unfortunately, rumors had got abroad—slander invented by the wine-shopkeeper opposite, said pious folks. But since the widower had re-married, the herbalist business was going to the dogs. The glass jars seemed to have lost their brightness, the dried herbs, suspended from the ceiling, were tumbling to dust. Jabouille himself was coughing his very life out, reduced to a skeleton, all his flesh consumed. And although Mathilde professed to be religious, the pious customers gradually deserted

her, being of opinion that she made herself too conspicuous, now that Jabouille was almost eaten out of house and home.

For a moment Mathilde remained motionless, blinking her eyes. A pungent smell had spread through the shop, the smell of the simples with which her dress was impregnated and which she brought with her in her greasy, tumbled hair; the sickly sweetness of mallow, the sharp odor of elderseed, the bitter effluvia of rhubarb, but, above all, the hot whiff of peppermint, which was like her very breath.

She made a gesture of feigned surprise. "Oh, dear me! you have company—I did not know; I'll drop in again."

"Yes, do," said Mahoudeau, looking very vexed. "Besides, I am going out; you'll give me a sitting on Sunday."

Claude, stupefied, stared at Mathilde, then at the vintaging woman.

"What!" he cried, "it's madame who poses for those muscles. The devil! you fatten her up."

Then the laughter began again, while the sculptor stammered his explanations. "Oh, no; she didn't pose for the bust—only for the head and the hands, and merely some indications, nothing more."

Mathilde, however, laughed with the others, with a sharp, brazen-faced laughter. She had deliberately entered the shop and closed the door. Then, as if at home, feeling in her element among all these men, she rubbed up against them and sniffed them. Her laughter showed the gaping holes in her mouth, where several teeth were wanting, and she looked ugly enough to frighten one—worn out already, her skin cleaving to her bones. Jory, whom she saw for the first time, must have seemed tempting to her, with his fresh chicken-like plumpness and his big suggestive pink nose. She prowled round him.

"No," said Mahoudeau, rising up. "I have to go out on business. Ain't it so, you fellows, we are being waited for over there?"

He had winked at his friends, feeling eager for a good lounge. They all answered that they were expected, and helped him to cover the vintaging girl with strips of old linen dipped in a pail of water.

However, Mathilde, looking submissive but sad, did not stir. She merely shifted from one place to another, when they pushed against her, while Chaîne, who was no longer painting, watched her over his picture. So far, he had not opened his lips. But as Mahoudeau at last went off with his three friends, he made up his mind and said in his heavy voice, rendered unwieldly by long spells of silence:

"Shall you come home to-night?"

"Very late. Have your dinner and go to bed. Good-bye."

And Chaîne remained alone with Mathilde in the damp shop, amidst the heaps of clay and the puddlers, in the broad smeary light of the whitened windows that glared crudely down on this nook of wretched untidiness.

When outside, Claude and Mahoudeau went on in front, while the other two followed. Jory pretended to be indignant when Sandoz began chaffing by assuring him that he had made the conquest of the herbalist.

"Oh, no, she is too horrid; she is old enough to be the mother of all of us."

The sally made Sandoz laugh. He shrugged his shoulders.

They dropped the subject. All four, strolling along, seemed to take up the width of the Boulevard des Invalides. It was the usual thing, the band gradually increasing by comrades met on the way, the untrammelled march of a horde on the war path. These

young fellows, with the bold assurance of their twenty summers, took possession of the pavement. The moment they were together trumpets seemed to sound in advance of them; they collared Paris with one hand and quietly dropped the city in their pockets. There was no longer the slightest doubt about victory; they displayed their threadbare coats and old shoes like conquerors of to-morrow, disdainful of these bagatelles, and having only to take the trouble to become the masters of all the luxuries surrounding them. And all this was accompanied by a huge contempt for everything that was not art, the contempt for fortune, contempt for the world at large, above all, contempt for politics. What was the good of all the latter rubbish? Only a lot of incapables meddled with it. A warped view of things, magnificent in its very injustice, exalted them; a determined ignorance of the necessities of social life, the crazy dream of there being nothing but artists on earth. They were stupid at times, but this passion made them strong and brave.

Claude became excited. Faith in himself revived amidst this glow of hopes shared in common. His worry of the morning had only left him vague numbness, and he had now begun to discuss his picture with Sandoz and Mahoudeau, swearing, it is true, that he would destroy it the next day. Jory, very short-sighted, stared at all the elderly ladies he met, and aired his theories on artistic work. A man ought to give his full measure at once; as for himself, he never corrected anything. And still discussing, the four friends went on down the boulevard, which, with its comparative solitude, and rows of fine trees, seemed made, as it were, for them to have their disputes out. When they reached the Esplanade, the wrangle became so violent that they stopped in the middle of the large open space. Beside himself, Claude called Jory a numskull. Was it not better to destroy one's work than to launch

a mediocre performance upon the world? It was really disgusting, this truckling to trade. Mahoudeau and Sandoz on their side shouted both at the same time. Some passers-by, feeling uneasy, turned round to look at them, and at last gathered round these furious young fellows, who seemed bent on swallowing each other. But they soon went away vexed, thinking that a practical joke had been played upon them, when they suddenly saw the quartette, all good friends again, go into raptures respecting a wet-nurse, dressed in light colors, with long cherry-tinted ribbons to her cap. There, now, that was something like—what a tint, what a bright note it set amid the surroundings! Delighted, they followed the nurse under the trees, blinking their eyes, as if abruptly aroused and astonished to find they had already gone so far. The Esplanade, open everywhere, shut in on the south only by the distant perspective of the Hôtel des Invalides, delighted them; it was so vast and calm; they there had plenty of room for their gestures; and they recovered their breath there, although they declared that Paris was too narrow for them, and lacked sufficient air to inflate their ambitious lungs.

"Are you going anywhere in particular?" asked Sandoz of Mahoudeau and Jory.

"No," answered the latter, "we are going with you. Where are you going?"

Claude, gazing carelessly about him, muttered: "I don't know. That way, if you like."

They turned on to the Quai d'Orsay, and went as far as the Pont de la Concorde. In front of the Corps Lêgislatif, the painters said, with an air of disgust: "What a hideous monument."

"Jules Favre made a famous speech the other day. How he did rile Rouher," said Jory.

However, the others left him no time to proceed, and the dispute recommenced. Who was Jules Favre? Who was Rouher? Did they exist? A parcel of idiots

whom no one would remember ten years after their death. They had begun to cross the bridge, and shrugged their shoulders with compassion. Then, when they reached the Place de la Concorde, they stopped short and relapsed into silence.

"Well," opined Claude at last, "this isn't bad, by any means."

It was four o'clock, and the day was waning amidst a glorious powdery shimmer. To the right and left, towards the Madeleine and towards the Corps Législatif, lines of buildings stretched away and stood out in relief against the sky, while the Tuileries Gardens displayed their gradient of lofty top-rounded chestnut-trees. And between the verdant borders of the pleasure walks the avenue of the Champs Elysées sloped upwards as far as the eye could reach, topped by the colossal Arc de Triomphe, which, gaping, disclosed infinite space. A double human current, a twofold stream rolled along—horses like living eddies, vehicles like retreating waves, which the reflection of a panel, the sudden sparkle of a carriage lamp seemed to tip with white foam. Lower down, the Place, with its vast footways, its roads as broad as lakes, swarmed with this constant ebb and flow, crossed in every direction by whirling wheels, and bespeckled with dark spots which were so many men, while the two fountains plashed, exhaling their coolness amid all the ardent vitality.

Claude, quivering with excitement, kept saying:

"Yes, we must have that! It's ours. We have only to take it."

They all grew excited, their eyes opened wide with desire, their fingers burned with the impatience for possession. Was it not glory herself that swept from the summit of this avenue over the whole of the capital? Paris was there, and they longed for it to be theirs.

"Well, we'll take it one day," said Sandoz with his obstinate air.

"To be sure we shall," said Mahoudeau and Jory in the simplest manner.

They had resumed walking; they still roamed about, found themselves behind the Madeleine, and went up the Rue Tronchet. At last they reached the Place du Havre, when Sandoz exclaimed: "So we are going to Baudequin's, eh?"

The others looked as if they had dropped from the sky; in fact, it seemed as if they were going to Baudequin's.

"What day of the week is it?" asked Claude. "Thursday, eh? Then Fagerolles and Gagnière are sure to be there. Let's go to Baudequin's."

And they went up the Rue d'Amsterdam. They had just crossed Paris, one of their favorite rambles, but they had other routes; from one end of the quays to the other at times; from the Porte St. Jacques to the Moulineaux, or else a spin to Père-la-Chaise, followed by a round-about return along the outer boulevards. They roamed the streets, the open spaces, the crossways; they rambled about for whole days, as long as their legs would carry them, and as if they wished to conquer one quarter after another by hurling their revolutionary theories at the house fronts; and the pavement seemed to be their property—all the pavement trodden by the soles of their feet, the old battlefield whence arose an intoxicating fume which made them forget their lassitude.

The Café Baudequin was situated on the Boulevard des Batignolles, at the corner of the Rue Darcet. Without the least why or wherefore, it had been selected by the band as their meeting-place, though Gagnière alone lived in the neighborhood. They met there regularly on Sunday nights; and on Thursday afternoons, at about five, those who were at liberty had made it

a habit to look in for a moment. On that day, as the weather was fine and bright, the little tables outside under the awning were all occupied by a double row of customers, obstructing the footway. But the band hated all this elbowing and public exhibition, so they jostled the crowd to enter the interior which was deserted and cool.

"Hallo, there's Fagerolles by himself," exclaimed Claude.

He had gone straight to their usual table at the end of the café, to the left, and was shaking hands with a pale, thin young man, whose girlish face was lighted up by a pair of winning, satirical, gray eyes, which at times flashed like steel. They all sat down and ordered beer, after which the painter resumed:

"Do you know that I went to look for you at your father's; and a nice reception he gave me."

Fagerolles, who affected a low, devil-may-care style, slapped his thighs. "Oh, the old fellow plagues me. I hooked it this morning, after a row. He wants me to draw some things for his beastly zinc stuff. As if I hadn't enough zinc stuff at the school."

This slap at the professors delighted the young men. He amused them and made himself their idol by his constant sneaky soft-soaping on one side and wigging on the other. His ominous smile went from one to the other, while, by the aid of a few drops of the beer spilt on the table, his long, nimble fingers, intuitively skilful, roughed out complicated sketches. His art came evidently very easily to him; it looked as if he could do anything with a turn of the hand.

"And Gagnière?" asked Mahoudeau. "Haven't you seen him?"

"No; I have been here for the last hour."

Jory, who remained silent, nudged Sandoz with his elbow, and with a nod of the head directed his attention to a girl seated with a gentleman at a table at

the back of the room. There were only two other customers, two sergeants, having a game of cards. The girl was almost a child, one of those Parisian female urchins who retain the macilency of green fruit at eighteen. She gave you the impression of a frizzed poodle—with a shower of little, fair locks above her dainty little nose and a large, smiling mouth set in her rosy mug. She was turning over the leaves of an illustrated paper, while the gentleman was gravely sipping a glass of Madeira, but every other minute she darted gay glances from over the paper towards the band.

"Pretty, isn't she?" whispered Jory, who was warming up. "Who is she staring at? She's looking at me."

But Fagerolles suddenly interfered: "I say, no nonsense; she belongs to me. Don't imagine that I have been here for the last hour merely waiting for you."

The others laughed; and lowering his voice he told them about Irma Bécot. They had come across each other by chance, and only once before. But she was great fun. He knew her story; she was the daughter of a grocer in the Rue Montorgueil. By no means ignorant, she knew how to spell, for she had been to school in the neighborhood till she was sixteen. She wrote her exercises between two bags of lentils, and had finished her education on her father's doorstep, as it were, lolling about on the pavement, amidst the jostling of the throng, learning all about life from the everlasting tittle-tattle of the cooks, who revealed all the abominations of the neighborhood while five sous' worth of Gruyère cheese was being served them. Her mother having died, her father had become sweet on his servants; very reasonably, though, and so as not to have to run about out of doors. It had ended, however, by giving him a taste of women's society, and he needed more of it; so at last he had gone in

for such sprees that the whole of the grocery shop was gradudlly swallowed up with its dried vegetables, and jars and drawers of sweetstuff. Irma was still going to school. Six months later the place was sold out; her father died of a fit of apoplexy, and Irma sought refuge with a poor aunt, who gave her more kicks than half-pence. She ran away with a young fellow living across the street, came back on three occasions and finally one day took her flight through all the dancing-places of Montmartre and Batignolles.

Suddenly, as the gentleman rose up and went out after whispering in her ear, Irma Bécot watched him disappear, and then, with the impulsiveness of a school-girl let loose, she hastened to seat herself beside Fagerolles.

"Do you see, eh? He sticks to me like a leech."

Jory, above all, seemed to interest her as he sat there. As he was smoking, she took his cigarette out of his mouth and set it in her own, but without interrupting her chatter, like that of a saucy magpie.

"You are all painters, aren't you? How amusing! But why do these three look as if they were sulking? Just laugh a bit, or I shall tickle you, you'll see!"

In fact, Sandoz, Claude and Mahoudeau, taken aback, sat watching her gravely. She herself remained listening, and hearing her companion come back, she hastily said to Fagerolles:

"To-morrow night I shall be at the Brasserie Bréda."

Then, after placing the cigarette, quite wet, between Jory's lips, she darted off with long strides, her arms in the air, and making a very comical grimace; so when the gentleman reappeared, looking sedate and somewhat pale, he found her reseated, still looking at the same engraving in the newspaper. The whole scene had been enacted so quickly, with such hasty drollery, that the sergeants, good-natured fellows, almost died with laughter as they shuffled their cards afresh.

In fact, Irma had taken them all by storm. Sandoz declared that her name of Bécot was very well suited for a novel; Claude asked whether she would consent to pose for a sketch; while Mahoudeau already pictured her as an urchin, a statuette that would be sure to sell. She soon went off, and behind the gentleman's back she sent kisses with her finger tips to the whole party, a shower of kisses which completed Jory's excitement. But Fagerolles was not disposed to part with her yet awhile, he was unconsciously amused at finding in her a child of the streets, like himself, and he was titillated by her mocking perversion, sprung from the pavement like his own.

It was five o'clock, and the band ordered some more beer. Some usual customers had taken possession of the adjacent tables, and these Philistines cast sidelong glances at the artists' corner, glances in which contempt was curiously mingled with a kind of uneasy deference. The artists were indeed well known; a legend was being coined respecting them. They themselves were now talking on commonplace subjects: about the heat, the difficulty of finding room in the omnibus to the Odéon, the discovery of a wine-shop where real meat was given you to eat. One of them wanted to start a discussion about a lot of idiotic pictures that had lately been hung in the Luxembourg Museum; but there was only one opinion on the subject, that the pictures were not worth their frames. Thereupon they left off conversing; they smoked, merely exchanging a word, or a significant smile now and then.

"Well," asked Claude at last, "are we going to wait for Gagnière?"

There was a protest. Gagnière was a bore. Besides, he would turn up as soon as he smelt the soup.

"Let's be off, then," said Sandoz. "There's a leg of mutton this evening, so let's try to be punctual."

Each paid his score, and they all went out. Their

departure threw the café into a state of emotion. Some young fellows, painters, no doubt, whispered as they pointed out Claude to one another, much in the same manner as if they had seen the redoubtable chieftain of a horde of savages pass along. Jory's famous article was producing its effect; the public itself was becoming his accomplice, and of itself was about to found the school of the open air, which the band had so far only joked about. As they gayly said, the Café Baudequin was not aware of the honor they had done it on the day when they selected it to be the cradle of a revolution.

Fagerolles having reinforced the group, they now numbered five, and slowly they took their way back across Paris, with their tranquil look of victory. The more numerous they were, the more they held the width of the pavement, and carried away at their heels the burning life of the streets. When they had gone down the Rue de Clichy, they went straight along the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, turned towards the Rue de Richelieu, crossed the Seine by the Pont des Arts, so as to fling their gibes at the Institute, and finally reached the Luxembourg by way of the Rue de Seine, where a poster, printed in three colors, the garish announcement of a traveling circus, made them all shout aloud with admiration. Evening was coming on; the stream of wayfarers flowed more slowly; the tired city was awaiting the shadows of night, ready to yield to the first comer sufficiently strong to take her.

On reaching the Rue d'Enfer, when Sandoz had ushered his four friends into his apartments, he once more vanished into his mother's room. He remained there for a few moments, and then came out without saying a word, but with the tender, gentle smile habitual to him on these occasions. And immediately afterwards there arose in his small rooms a terrible hub-

bub, discussions, laughter and clamor. Sandoz himself set the example, all the while assisting the charwoman, who burst forth into bitter language because it was half-past seven, and her leg of mutton was drying up. The five companions, seated at table, were already swallowing their soup, a very good onion soup, when a new comer appeared.

"Hallo! here's Gagnière," was the vociferous chorus.

Gagnière, small and vague-looking, with a doll-like, startled face, set off by a fair curly beard, stood for a moment on the threshold blinking his green eyes. He belonged to Melun, where his well-to-do parents, who were both dead, had left him two houses; and he had learnt painting, unassisted, in the forest of Fontainebleau. His landscapes were conscientious, at least, excellent in intent; but his real passion was music, madness for music, a cerebral bonfire which set him on a level with the wildest of the band.

"Am I in the way?" he asked, gently.

"Not at all; come in," shouted Sandoz.

The charwoman was already laying an extra knife and fork.

"Suppose she lays a place for Dubuche, while she is about it," said Claude. "He told me he would perhaps come."

But they were all down upon Dubuche, who frequented women in society. Jory said that he had seen him in a vehicle with an old lady and her daughter, whose parasols he was holding on his knees.

"Where have you come from to be so late?" asked Fagerolles of Gagnière.

The latter, who was about to swallow his first spoonful of soup, sat it in his plate again.

"I was in the Rue de Lancry, you know, where they have chamber music. Oh! my boy, some of Schumann's machines! You haven't an idea of them. They clutch hold of you at the back of your head.

Yes, yes, something much more immaterial than a kiss, just a whiff of breath. 'Pon my honor, a fellow feels as if he were going to die."

His eyes were moistening, he turned pale, as if experiencing unduly acute enjoyment.

"Eat your soup," said Mahoudeau; "you'll tell us all about it afterwards."

The skate was served, and they had the vinegar bottle put on the table to flavor the black butter, which seemed rather insipid. They ate with a will, and the hunks of bread swiftly disappeared. There was nothing refined—merely common wine, which they watered considerably from a feeling of delicacy, in order to lessen their host's expenses. They had just saluted the leg of mutton with a hurrah, and the host had begun to carve it, when the door opened anew. But this time there were furious protests.

"No, no, not another soul! Turn him out, turn him out!"

Dubuche, out of breath with having run, bewildered at finding himself amidst all this howling, protruded his fat, pallid face, stammering explanations.

"Really, I assure you it was the fault of the omnibus. I had to wait for five of them in the Champs Elysées."

"No no, he's lying! Let him go off, he sha'n't have any of that mutton. Turn him out, turn him out!"

All the same, he ended by coming in, and it was then noticed that he was stylishly attired, all in black, trousers and frock-coat alike, and cravated and booted in the stiff, ceremonious fashion of some respectable member of the middle classes going out to dinner.

"Hallo! he has missed his invitation," chaffed Fagerolles. "Don't you see that his fine ladies didn't ask him to stay to dinner, and now he comes to gobble

up our leg of mutton, as he doesn't know where else to go."

At this Dubuche turned red, and stammered: "Oh! what an idea! How ill-natured you are! And, besides, just attend to your own business."

Sandoz and Claude, seated next to each other, smiled, and the former beckoned to Dubuche, and said to him: "Lay your own place, bring a plate and a glass, and sit between us—they'll leave you alone."

However, the chaff continued all the time that the mutton was being eaten. When the charwoman had brought Dubuche a plate of soup and a piece of skate, he himself fell in with the jokes good-naturedly. He pretended to be famished, greedily mopped out his plate, and related a story about a mother having refused him her daughter because he was an architect. The end of the dinner was thus very boisterous; they all spoke at the same time. The only dessert, a piece of Brie cheese, met with enormous success. Not a scrap of it was left, and the bread almost ran short. The wine did run short, so they each swallowed a clear draught of water, smacking their lips amidst great laughter. And, with faces beaming, and well-filled paunches, they passed into the bed-room with the supreme content of folks who have fared very sumptuously indeed.

These were the jolly evenings at Sandoz's. Even at times when he was hard up he had had some boiled beef and broth to share with his comrades. He felt delighted at having a lot of them around him, all friends, inspired by the same ideas. Though he was of their own age, he coruscated with fatherly feelings and satisfied good-nature when he saw them in his rooms, around him, hand in hand, and intoxicated with hope. As he had but two rooms, the bed-room did duty as a drawing-room, and was as much theirs as his. Being short of chairs, two or three had

to seat themselves on the bed. On these warm summer evenings the window remained wide open, letting in the air from outside, and rising up above the houses, against the clear sky, one perceived two black silhouettes—the tower of St. Jacques du Haut-Pas and the tree of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum. When money was plentiful there was beer. Every one brought his own tobacco, the room soon filled with smoke, and they ended by conversing without seeing each other until very late into the night, amidst the deep, mournful silence of this deserted neighborhood.

On that particular evening, at about nine o'clock, the charwoman came in.

"Monsieur, I have done. Can I go?"

"Yes, go to bed. You have left the kettle on the fire, haven't you? I'll make the tea myself."

Sandoz had risen. He disappeared at the heels of the charwoman, and only returned a quarter of an hour afterwards. He had no doubt been to kiss his mother, whom he tucked up every night before she dozed off.

Meanwhile the voices had risen to a high pitch again. Fagerolles was telling a story.

"Yes, old fellow; at the School they even correct Nature herself. The other day Mazel comes up to me and says: 'Those two thighs are not alike;' whereupon I reply: 'Look for yourself, monsieur—the model's are like that.' It was little Flore Beauchamp, you know. 'Well,' Mazel furiously replies, 'if she has got them like that, it's very wrong of her.'"

They almost all shrieked, especially Claude, to whom Fagerolles told the story by way of paying court. For some time previously the younger artist had yielded to the elder's influence; and although he continued to paint, with tricky skill, he no longer talked of anything but substantial, thickly-painted work, of bits of Nature thrown on to the canvas, breathing and throb-

bing with life, such as they were. This did not prevent him, though, from elsewhere chaffing the adepts of the open air school, whom he accused of impasting their work with a kitchen ladle.

Dubuche, who had not laughed, his sense of rectitude being offended, made so bold as to reply:

"Why do you stop at the School if you think you are being brutified there? It's very simple, one goes away! Oh, I know you are all against me, because I defend the School. But, do you see, my idea is that, when a fellow wants to carry on a trade, it is not at all a bad thing for him to begin by learning it."

Ferocious shouts arose, and Claude needed all his authority to secure a hearing.

"He is right. One must learn one's trade. But it won't do to learn it under the ferule of professors who want to cram their own views forcibly into your head. That Mazel is a perfect idiot!"

He flung himself backward on the bed, on which he had been sitting, and, his eyes lifted to the ceiling, he continued, in an excited tone:

"Ah! life! life! to feel it and reproduce it in its reality, to love it for itself, to behold therein the only real, lasting and changing beauty, not to have the idiotic idea of ennobling it by mutilating it, but to understand that all so-called ugliness is nothing but the especial sign of individual character, to create men and endow them with life—that is the only way to become a god."

His faith was coming back to him, the march across Paris had spurred him on once more; he was again seized with his passion for living flesh. They listened to him in silence. He made a wild gesture, then he calmed down.

"No doubt every one has his own ideas; but the annoyance is that at the Institute they are even more intolerant than we are. The hanging committee of

the Salon is in their hands. I am sure that that idiot Mazel will refuse my picture."

Whereupon they all broke out in imprecations, for this question of the hanging committee was the everlasting subject of their wrath. They demanded reforms; every one had a solution of the problem ready—from universal suffrage, applied to the election of a hanging committee, liberal in the widest sense of the word, down to unrestricted liberty, a Salon open to all exhibitors.

"Eh! what? What am I going to send to the Salon? A small landscape, perhaps; a little bit of the Seine. It is so difficult; first of all I must be pleased with it myself."

"For my part," said Mahoudeau, "I feel delighted at the prospect of making them squint with my woman."

Claude shrugged his shoulders. "Oh! you'll be received, the sculptors are larger-minded than the painters. And, besides, you know very well what you are about; you have something at your fingers' ends that pleases. There will be plenty of pretty bits about your vintaging girl."

The compliment made Mahoudeau feel serious. He posed above all for vigor of execution; he was unconscious of his real vein of talent and despised gracefulness—which, albeit, invincibly emanated from his coarse, untaught, workingman's fingers, like a flower that obstinately sprouts from the hard soil where the wind has flung its seed.

Fagerolles, very cunning, had decided not to send anything for fear of displeasing his masters, and he chaffed the Salon, "a foul bazaar," so he called it, "where the good painting turned musty just like the bad." In his inmost heart he was dreaming of the prize of Rome, which he ridiculed, however, like everything else.

However, Jory stuck himself in the middle of the room, holding his glass of beer. Sipping at it now and then, he declared:

"After all, your hanging committee disgusts me! I say, shall I demolish it? I'll begin bombarding it in the very next number. You'll give me some notes, eh? and we'll knock it down. It'll be fine fun."

Claude was at last fully wound up, and general enthusiasm prevailed. Yes, yes, they must start a campaign. They would all be in it, and, pressing shoulder to shoulder, march to the battle together. At that moment there was not one of them who reserved his share of fame, for nothing divided them as yet; neither their profound dissemblances, of which they themselves were not aware, nor their rivalries, which would some day make them clash together. Was not the success of one the success of all the others? Their youth was fermenting, they were brimming over with devotion; they recommenced their everlasting dream of gathering into a phalanx to conquer the world, each contributing his individual effort; this one pushing that one forward, the whole band arriving at once on the same rank. Claude, as the acknowledged chief, was already sounding the victory, distributing the laurels with such lyrical abundance that he overlooked himself. Gibing Parisian though he might be, Fagerolles himself believed in the necessity of being an army; while even Jory, although he had a coarser appetite, with a deal of the provincial still about him, spent himself in useful comradeship, catching various artistic phrases as they fell from his companions' lips, and already preparing in his mind the articles which would herald the advent of the band and make them known. And Mahoudeau purposely exaggerated his intentional brutalities, clasped his own hands, like an ogre kneading human flesh; while Gagnière, in ecstasy, as if emancipated from the everlasting grayishness of his

painting, endeavored to refine every sensation to the final yielding of all intelligence; and Dubuche, with his matter-of-fact convictions, only threw in a word here and there, but words like blows from a club in the very midst of the fray. Then Sandoz, happy and smiling at seeing them so united, "all in one shirt," as he put it, opened another bottle of beer. He would have emptied every one in the house.

"Eh!" he cried. "We're agreed, let's stick to it. It's really pleasant to come to an understanding among fellows who have something in their heads, and may the thunderbolts of heaven sweep all idiots away!"

At that same moment a ring at the bell stupefied him. Amidst the sudden silence of the others, he asked: "Who, the deuce, can that be—at eleven o'clock?"

He ran to open the door, and they heard him utter a cry of delight. He was already coming back again, throwing the door wide open as he said: "Ah! it's very kind, indeed, to think of us like that and to surprise us! Bongrand, gentlemen."

The great painter, whom the master of the house announced in this respectfully familiar way, entered, holding out both hands. They all eagerly rose, evincing emotion, happy at this shake of a manly hand, so cordially bestowed. The new comer was a stout man, forty-five years old, with a very expressive face and long gray hair. He had recently became a member of the Institute, and the simple alpaca jacket he wore displayed the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor in its buttonhole. He was fond of young people; he liked nothing so much as to drop in from time to time and to smoke a pipe among these beginners, whose enthusiasm warmed his heart.

"I am going to make the tea," shouted Sandoz.

When he came back from the kitchen, carrying the teapot and cups, he found Bongrand installed astride a chair, smoking his short cutty, amidst the din

which had again arisen. Bongrand himself was holding forth in a stentorian voice. The grandson of a farmer of the Beauce country, the son of a man risen to the middle classes, with peasant blood in his veins, owing his culture to a mother of very artistic tastes, he was rich, had no need to sell his pictures, and retained many tastes and opinions of Bohemian life.

"The hanging committee? Well, I'd sooner hang myself than belong to it," he said, with sweeping gestures. "Am I an executioner to kick poor devils, who often want to earn their bread, out of doors?"

"Still," observed Claude, "you might render us great service by defending our pictures before the committee."

"Oh, dear, no! I should only make matters worse for you—I don't count; I'm nobody."

There was a chorus of protestations, Fagerolles objected in a shrill voice.

"Well, if the painter of 'The Village Wedding' does not count—"

But Bongrand was getting angry; he had risen up, his cheeks afire.

"Don't pester me, eh! with 'The Wedding;' I warn you I am getting sick of that picture. It is becoming a perfect nightmare to me ever since it has been hung in the Luxembourg Museum."

This "Village Wedding" had so far remained his masterpiece; a party of wedding guests roaming through a corn-field, peasants studied from life, with an epic look of the heroes of Homer about them. The picture had brought about an evolution in art, for it had inaugurated a new doctrine. Coming after Delacroix, and parallel with Courbet, it was a piece of romanticism, tempered by logic, with more correctness of observation, more perfection in the handling. However, it was not the face-to-face encounter with Nature in the crudity of the open air, and yet all the new

school claimed connection with the style of art it had inaugurated.

"There can be nothing more beautiful," said Claude, "than the two first groups, the fiddler, and then the bride with the old peasant."

"And the strapping peasant girl, then," added Mahoudeau; "the one who is turning round and beckoning! I had a great mind to take her for the model of a statue."

"And that gust of wind among the corn," added Gagnière, "and the pretty bit of the boy and girl skylarking in the distance."

Bongrand was listening with an embarrassed air, and a smile of inward suffering; and on Fagerolles asking him what he was doing just then, he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders:

"Well, nothing; some little things—I sha'n't exhibit this time. I should like to find a subject which would prove a blow! Ah, you fellows are happy to be still at the bottom of the hill. One has such good legs, one feels so plucky when it's a question of getting up. And then when once one's atop, the deuce take it! the worries commence. A real torture, fisticuffs, efforts which must be constantly renewed, lest one should slip down too quickly! On my word! one would prefer being below, for the pleasure of having still everything to do! Ah, you may laugh, you'll see for yourself some day!"

They were, indeed, laughing, thinking it all a paradox, or the affectation of a celebrity which they however excused. To be hailed like Bongrand with the name of master was that not the height of bliss? His two arms resting on the back of his chair, he listened to them in silence, leisurely puffing his pipe.

Meanwhile, Dubuche, who had rather domesticated tastes, helped Sandoz in handing the tea round, and the din continued. Fagerolles related a story about

Daddy Maigras and a female cousin by marriage, whom the dealer offered as a model. Then they began to talk of models. However, suddenly the tumult increased again, Gagnière was being congratulated on the subject of a connoisseur whose acquaintance he had made in the Palais Royal one afternoon, while the band played, an eccentric gentleman living on a small income, and who never indulged in any other extravagance than that of buying pictures. While laughing, the other artists asked for the gentleman's address. Then they fell foul of the picture dealers, dirty blackguards, who starved artists. It was really a pity that connoisseurs mistrusted painters to such a degree as to insist upon a middleman under the impression that they were making a better bargain. This question of bread and butter made them yet more excited, though Claude showed a magnificent contempt. One was robbed, no doubt, but what did that matter, if one had painted a masterpiece, and had some water to drink? Jory, having again expressed some low ideas about lucre, aroused general indignation. Out with the journalist! He was asked stringent questions. Would he sell his pen? Would he not sooner chop off his wrist than write aught against his convictions? But they scarcely waited for his answer, for the excitement was still on the increase; it became the superb exaltation of early manhood, contempt for the whole world, the undivided passion for work, freed from all human infirmities, poised in the sky like the sun. Their desire was to consume themselves in this brazier of their own kindling!

Bongrand, who had not stirred the while, made a vague gesture of suffering at sight of this illimited confidence, this boisterous joy in the prospect of attack. He forgot the hundred paintings which had

brought him his glory, he was thinking of the work, the sketch of which was on his easel now. Taking his cutty from between his lips, he murmured, his eyes glistening with a tender concern: "Oh, youth, youth!"

Until two in the morning, Sandoz, who seemed ubiquitous, kept on pouring fresh supplies of hot water in the teapot. Rising from the neighborhood, laid low by sleep, one now only heard the miawing of a tabby. They all talked at random, intoxicated by their own words, hoarse with having shouted so much, their eyes scorched, and when at last they made up their minds to go, Sandoz took the lamp to show them a light over the banisters, saying very softly:

"Don't make a noise, my mother is asleep."

The hushed footfall of their boots on the stairs died away at last, and a deep silence pervaded the house.

It struck four. Claude, who had accompanied Bongrand, was still talking to him in the deserted streets. He did not want to go to bed; he was waiting for daylight, with an impatient fury, to set to work at his picture again. This time he felt certain of painting a masterpiece, exalted as he was by this happy day of good-fellowship, his mind painfully pregnant with a world of things. He had discovered at last what painting meant, and he pictured himself reentering his studio as one returns into the presence of a beloved woman, his heart throbbing violently, regretting at present even this one day's absence, which seemed to him endless desertion. He would go straight to his canvas, and realize his dream in one sitting. However, at every dozen steps, in the flickering light of the gas lamps, Bongrand caught him by a button of his coat, repeating to him that this confounded painting was simply a damnable trade. Sharp as he, Bongrand, was supposed to be, he did not understand it

yet. At every new work he felt as if he were making a début; it was enough to make one smash one's head against the wall. The sky was now brightening, some market gardener's carts began rolling down towards the Central Markets; and the pair continued chattering, each talking for himself, in a loud voice beneath the paling stars.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTINE'S SACRIFICE.

SIX weeks later, Claude was painting one morning amidst a flood of sunshine that fell through the large window of his studio. Constant rain had made the middle of August very dull, but courage for work returned with the blue sky. His great picture did not make much progress, albeit he worked at it during long, silent mornings, like the obstinate, struggling artist that he was.

Suddenly there came a knock at the door. He thought it was Madame Joseph, the doorkeeper, bringing up his breakfast, and as the key was always in the door, he simply called out: "Come in!"

The door had opened; there was a slight rustle, and then all was still. He continued to paint without even turning his head. But this quivering silence, the consciousness of some vague, gentle breathing, made him fidgety at last. He looked up, and felt amazed; a woman was there, clad in a light-tinted dress, her features half-hidden by a white veil, and he did not know her, and she was holding a bunch of roses, which completed his bewilderment.

All at once he recognized her.

"You, mademoiselle! Well, I certainly didn't expect you."

It was Christine. He had been unable to restrain this somewhat unamiable exclamation, which was a cry from the heart itself. At first he had certainly thought of her; then, as the days went by, as for

nearly two months she had given no sign of life, she had become but a fleeting and regretted vision, a charming profile, dissolved into space, and never to be beheld again.

"Yes, monsieur, it's I. I wished to come. I thought it was wrong not to come and thank you—"

She blushed and stammered, at a loss for words. She was out of breath, no doubt with coming up the stairs, for her heart was beating fast. What! was this visit out of place, although so long debated, and although at last it had seemed quite natural to her? The worst was that, in passing along the quay, she had bought this bunch of roses with the delicate intention of showing her gratitude to the young fellow, and the flowers now dreadfully embarrassed her. How was she to give them to him? What would he think of her? The impropriety of the whole proceeding had only struck her as she opened the door.

But Claude, more embarrassed still, had resorted to exaggerated politeness. He had thrown aside his palette and was turning the studio upside down to clear a chair.

"Pray be seated, mademoiselle. This is really a surprise. You are too kind."

Once seated, Christine recovered her equanimity. He looked so droll with his wild, sweeping gestures; she felt so conscious of his shyness that she began to smile, and she bravely held out to him the bunch of roses.

"Look here; I wished to show you that I am not ungrateful."

At first he said nothing, but stood staring at her, thunderstruck. When he saw, though, that she was not making fun of him, he shook both her hands, as if to dislocate them. Then he at once put the flowers in his water-jug, repeating:

"Ah! now you are a good fellow, you really are.

This is the first time I pay that compliment to a woman, honor bright."

He came back to her, and, looking straight into her eyes, he asked:

"Then you have not altogether forgotten me?"

"You see that I have not," she replied, laughing.

"Why, then, did you wait two months before coming to see me?"

Again she blushed. The falsehood she was about to tell revived her embarrassment for a moment.

"But you know that I am not my own mistress," she said. "Oh, Madame Vanzade is very kind to me, only she is a great invalid, and never goes out. But she grew anxious as to my health and compelled me to go out to breathe the fresh air."

She did not allude to the shame which she had felt during the first few days after her adventure on the Quai de Bourbon. Finding herself in safety, beneath the old lady's roof, the recollection of the night she had spent in a man's room had filled her with remorse as if she had sinned; but she fancied at last that she had succeeded in dismissing that man from her mind. It was no longer anything but a bad dream, the outlines of which grew more indistinct day by day. Then without knowing how, amidst the profound quietude of her existence, the image had emerged once more from the shadow, becoming more precise and more sharply outlined, to a degree that it proved the constant preoccupation of her daily life. Why should she forget him? She had nothing to reproach him with, on the contrary, she felt she was his debtor. The thought of seeing him again, repelled at first, struggled against later on, had at last turned to an all-absorbing idea. Each evening temptation came strong upon her in the solitude of her own room, in the shape of an uncomfortable sensation that irritated her, of a desire of which she herself was

scarcely aware, and she had only calmed down somewhat on attributing her troubled state of mind to a wish of showing her gratitude. She was so utterly alone, she felt so stifled in this sleepy abode, the exuberance of youth seethed so strongly within her, her heart craved so desperately for friendship!

"So I took advantage of my first day out," she continued. "And besides, the weather was so nice this morning after all the dull rain."

Claude, feeling very happy and standing before her, also confessed himself, but he had nothing to hide.

"As for me, I did not dare think of you any more. You are like one of the fairies of the story-books, who spring from the floor and disappear into the walls at the very moment one least expects it; aren't you now? I said to myself: 'It's all over; it was perhaps only in my fancy that she came to this studio.' And here you are. Well, I am pleased at it, very much pleased, indeed."

Smiling, but embarrassed, Christine averted her head, pretending to look around her. But her smile soon died away. This ferocious style of painting which she again beheld, these glaring sketches of the South, the terrible anatomical accuracy of the figures, chilled her as they had done on the first occasion. She became really afraid again, and she said gravely, in an altered voice:

"I am disturbing you; I am going."

"But not at all, not at all," exclaimed Claude, preventing her from rising up. "It does me good to have a talk with you, for I was working myself to death. Oh! that confounded picture; it's killing me as it is."

And Christine, lifting her eyes, looked at the large picture, the canvas that had been turned to the wall on the other occasion, and which she had vainly wished to see.

The background—the dark glade pierced by a flood of sunlight—was still only broadly brushed in. But the two little wrestlers—the fair one and the dark—almost finished by now, stood out clearly in the light with their fresh tints. In the foreground, the gentleman in the velveteen jacket, begun afresh thrice, had been left in distress. The painter was especially working at the principal figure, at the woman lying on the grass. He had not touched the head again. He was battling with the body, changing his model every week, so despondent at not being able to satisfy himself that for a couple of days he had been trying to improve the figure from imagination, without recourse to nature, although he boasted that he never invented.

Christine at once recognized herself. This girl sprawling on the grass, one arm behind her head, smiling with lowered eyelids, was she. This girl had her features, and the idea revolted her as much as if she had had the same body as herself. She was above all wounded by the wildness of the painting, so brutal, indeed, that she considered herself abominably insulted. She did not understand that kind of art; she thought it execrable, and felt a hatred against it, the instinctive hatred of an enemy. She rose up at last, and curtly repeated: "I must be going."

Claude watched her attentively, both grieved and surprised by this sudden change of manner.

"Going already?"

"Yes, they are waiting for me. Good-bye."

And she had already reached the door before he could take her hand and venture to ask her:

"When shall I see you again?"

She allowed her hand to remain in his. For a moment she seemed to hesitate.

"I don't know. I am so busy."

Then she withdrew her hand and went off, hastily, saying: "One of these days, when I can. Good-bye."

Claude remained stock-still on the threshold. He wondered what had come over her again to cause this sudden coolness, this covert irritation. He closed the door, and walked about, with dangling arms, and without understanding, seeking vainly for the phrase, the gesture that could have offended her. And he in his turn became angry, and launched an oath into space, with a terrific shrug of the shoulders, as if to rid himself of this silly preoccupation. Did a fellow ever understand women? But the sight of the roses, overlapping the water-jug, pacified him; they smelt so nice. Their scent pervaded the whole studio, and silently he resumed his work amidst the perfume.

Two more months passed by. During the first days Claude, at the slightest stir of a morning, when Madame Joseph brought him up his breakfast or his letters, quickly turned his head, and could not control a gesture of disappointment. He no longer went out until after four, and the doorkeeper having told him one evening, on his return home, that a young girl had called to see him at about five, he had only grown calm on ascertaining that the visitor was merely a model, Zoé Piedefer. Then, as the days went by, he was taken with a furious fit of work, becoming unapproachable to every one, indulging in such violent theories that even his friends did not venture to contradict him. He swept the world from his path with one gesture; there was no longer anything but painting left. One might murder one's parents, comrades, and women especially. From this terrible fever he had fallen into an abominable despondency, a week of impotence and doubt, a whole week of torture, during which he had fancied himself struck silly. And he was getting over it, he had resumed his usual life, his resigned and solitary struggle with his great picture, when one foggy morning, towards the end of October, he started and hastily set aside his palette. There

had been no knock, but he had just recognized the footfall coming up the stairs. He opened the door and she walked in. She had come at last.

Christine that day wore a large cloak of gray material, wrapping her up from neck to heel. Her little velvet hat was dark, and the fog outside had pearled her black lace veil. But he thought her looking very cheerful, with her slight winter shiver upon her. She began at once to make excuses for having so long delayed returning. She smiled at him in her pretty, candid manner, confessed that she had hesitated, and that she had almost made up her mind to come no more. Yes, she had her own opinions about things, which she felt sure he understood. As it happened, he did not understand at all—he had no wish to understand, seeing that she was there. It was quite sufficient that she was not vexed with him, that she would consent to come in now and then like a chum. There were no explanations; they kept their respective torments and the struggles of recent times to themselves. For nearly an hour they chattered together right pleasantly, with nothing hidden or antagonistic left between them, as if an understanding had been arrived at, unbeknown to them, and while they were far apart. She did not even appear to notice the sketches and studies along the walls. For a moment she looked fixedly at the large picture, at the figure of the woman lying on the grass under the blazing, golden sun. No, it was not like herself, the girl had neither her face nor her body. How silly to have fancied that this horrid mess of color was herself. And her friendship for the young fellow was heightened by a touch of pity; he could not even convey a likeness. When going she shook both his hands.

"You know, I shall come back again."

"Yes, in two months."

"No, next week. You'll see, next Thursday."

On the Thursday she punctually returned. After that she did not miss a week. At first she had no particular day, simply taking advantage of her opportunities; then she selected Monday, the day set aside by Madame Vanzade so that she might have a walk in the fresh, open air of the Bois de Boulogne. She had to be back by eleven, and walked the whole way very quickly, coming in all aglow from having run, for it was a tidy stretch from Passy to the Quai de Bourbon. During four winter months, from October to February, she came like that in the drenching rain, in the mists from the Seine, in the pale sunlight that threw a little warmth on the quays. Indeed, after the first month, she at times arrived unexpectedly on other days, taking advantage of some errand in town to look in, and she could only stay for a couple of minutes; they had barely time enough to say, "How do you do?" she was already scampering down the stairs again, exclaiming, "Good-bye."

And now Claude learned to know Christine. With his everlasting mistrust of woman a suspicion had remained to him, the suspicion of some love adventure in the provinces; but the young girl's soft eyes and bright laughter had carried all before them; he felt her to be as innocent as a big child. As soon as she arrived, quite unembarrassed, feeling at her ease, as if with a friend, she began to indulge in a ceaseless flow of chatter. She had told him a score of times about her childhood at Clermont, and she constantly reverted to it. On the evening that her father, Captain Hallegrain, had died suddenly, she and her mother had been to church. She perfectly remembered their return home and the horrible night that followed; the captain, very stout and muscular, stretched on a mattress, with his lower jaw protruding to such a degree that in her girlish memory she could not picture him otherwise. She also had that same jaw, and when her

mother had not known how to master her, she had often cried out: "Ah, you Punch, you'll eat your heart's blood out like your father." Poor mother! how she, Christine, had worried her with her love of horseplay, with her mad fits of noise. As far back as she could remember, she pictured her seated at the same window, a slim little woman, quietly painting her fans, with very soft eyes, the only thing she had inherited of her. When people wanted to please her mother they told her, "She has got your eyes." And she smiled, happy in the thought of having contributed at least this touch of sweetness to her daughter's features. After the death of her husband, she worked so late as to endanger her eyesight. But how else could she have lived? Her widow's pension—five hundred francs per annum—barely sufficed for the needs of her child. During five years the latter had seen her mother grow thinner and paler, wasting away a little bit more each day until she became nothing but a mere shadow. And now she felt remorse at not having been more obedient, at having driven her mother to despair by her want of application, beginning each week with magnificent intentions, promising that she would soon assist her in earning money. But her arms got the fidgets, in spite of all her efforts; the moment she became quiet she fell ill. Then one morning her mother had been unable to get up, and had died; her voice too weak to make itself heard, her eyes full of big tears. Her mother was always present to her mind, like that, already dead, and with her eyes wide open, still weeping and fixed on her.

At other times, Christine, questioned by Claude about Clermont, forgot all these sorrows to indulge more cheerful recollections.

When all the reminiscences of Clermont were exhausted, Claude wanted to hear about her life at Madame Vanzade's, and each week she gave him some

fresh particulars. In the small house at Passy, silent and shut off from the outer world, life was regular, with no more noise about it than the weakened tic-tac of an old-fashioned timepiece. Two antiquated domestics, a cook and a man servant, who had been with the family for forty years, alone glided along the deserted rooms, their slippers not even creaking, but with the silent footfall of a couple of ghosts. Now and then, at very long intervals, there came a visitor: some octogenarian general so dried up that his weight scarcely pressed the carpet. It was the home of shadows, through the Venetian blinds the sun only penetrated with the gleam of a night light. Since madame—having become paralyzed in the knees and stone-blind—no longer left her room, she had no other recreation than listening to the reading of religious books. Ah! those endless readings, how they weighed upon the young girl at times! If she had only known a trade, how gladly she would have cut out dresses, concocted bonnets, or goffered the petals of artificial flowers. And to think that she was capable of nothing, that she had been taught everything, and that there was only enough stuff in her for a salaried drudge, a semi-domestic. And she suffered horribly in this stiff, pent-up dwelling that smelt of the tomb. She was seized once more with the vertigo of her childhood, like when she had wanted to compel herself to work to please her mother; her blood rebelled; she would have liked to shout and jump about, in her desire for life. But madame treated her so gently, sending her away from her own room as it were, ordering her to take long walks, that she felt full of remorse when, on her return from the Quai de Bourbon, she was obliged to tell a falsehood; to talk of the Bois de Boulogne; invent some ceremony at church where she now never set her feet. Madame seemed to take to her more and more every day;

there were constant presents, a silk dress, a tiny gold watch, even some underlinen. She herself was very fond of Madame Vanzade; she had wept one day when the latter called her her daughter; she had sworn never to leave her now, in her heartfelt pity at seeing her so old and helpless.

"Well," said Claude one morning, "you'll be rewarded; she'll leave you her money."

Christine looked astonished. "Do you think so? It is said that she is worth three millions! No, no, I have never dreamt of such a thing, and I won't. What would become of me?"

Claude had averted his head, and then he hastily added: "Well, you'd become rich, that's all. But, no doubt, she'll first of all marry you off—"

On hearing this, Christine could hold out no longer, but interrupted him with a burst of laughter. "To one of her old friends; perhaps the general who has a silver chain! What a good joke!"

So far they had gone no further than chumming like old friends. He was almost as new to life as she, having had nothing but chance adventures, living in an ideal world of his own, amid romantic events. To see each other in secret like this, from pure friendship, without anything more tender than a cordial shake of the hand at her arrival, and another one on separating, seemed to them quite natural. As for Claude, he no longer even questioned himself as to her possible knowledge of life and of men, amid her girl's ignorance. It was she who scented that he was shy, who looked at him now and then fixedly, with the dreamy look and disturbed wonder of passion, not aware of its own existence. But as yet nothing ardent or agitating spoilt the pleasure they felt in being together. Their hands remained cool; they spoke cheerfully on all subjects; they sometimes argued like friends, sure not to fall out. Only this friendship

became so strong that they could no longer live without seeing each other.

The moment Christine came, Claude took the key from outside the door. She herself insisted upon this, lest some one might disturb them. After a few visits she had taken absolute possession of the studio. She seemed to be at home in it. She was worried by the idea of making the place a little more tidy, for she felt a nervous suffering amidst such disorder. But it was not an easy job. The painter had strictly forbidden Madame Joseph to sweep up, lest the dust should get on the fresh paint. So, on the first occasions when his companion attempted to clean up a bit, he watched her with an anxious and supplicating look. What was the good of changing the place of things? Didn't it suffice to have them at hand? However, she exhibited such gay obstinacy, she seemed so happy to play the housewife, that he had let her have her own way at last. And now, the moment she had arrived and taken off her gloves, she pinned up her dress not to soil it, displaced everything, set the spacious studio in order in the twinkling of an eye. There was no longer a pile of cinders before the stove; the screen hid the bedstead and the washstand; the couch was brushed; the wardrobe rubbed down and shiny; the deal table cleared of the crockery, and without a stain of paint; and above the chairs, symmetrically ranged along the walls, against which the spanned easels were propped, the large cuckoo clock, with the blooming pink flowers on its dial, seemed to tick more sonorously. Altogether it was magnificent; one would not have recognized the place. He, stupefied, watched her trotting to and fro, twisting about, singing as she went. Was this then the lazybones who had dreadful headaches at the least bit of work? But she laughed: at headwork, yes; but exertion with her hands and feet did her good, seemed to straighten her like a young

shoot. She confessed, as she would have confessed a depraved taste, her liking for lowly household cares; a liking which had greatly worried her mother, whose educational ideal consisted in artistic attainments; the governess with soft hands, touching nothing vulgar. And how Christine had been chided when caught as a little girl sweeping, dusting, playing at cook, with delight. Even now-a-days, if she had been able to indulge in a bout with the dust at Madame Vanzade's, she would have felt less bored. But what would they have said to that? She would no longer have been considered a lady. And so she came to satisfy her longings at the Quai de Bourbon, panting with so much exercise, all aglow, her eyes glistening with a woman's delight at biting into the forbidden fruit.

Claude by this time grew conscious of the cares of a woman around him. In order to make her sit down and chat quietly, he asked her now and then to sew a torn cuff or coat-tail. She herself had offered to look over his linen; but it was no longer the ardor of the housewife, eager to be up and doing. First of all, she did not know how to work; she held her needle like a girl brought up in contempt of sewing. Besides, the enforced quiescence and attention, the small stitches to be looked to one by one, exasperated her. The studio was bright with cleanliness like a drawing-room, but Claude himself remained in rags, and they both joked about it, thinking it great fun.

How happy those months were that they spent together, those four months of frost and rain whiled away in the studio, where the red-hot stove roared like an organ-pipe. The winter seemed to isolate them still more. When the snow covered the adjacent roofs, when the sparrows fluttered against the window, they smiled at feeling warm, and at being lost, as it were, amidst the large, silent city. And they were not always confined to this one little nook, for she allowed

him at last to see her home. For a long while she had insisted upon going away by herself, feeling ashamed at being seen in the streets on a man's arm. Then one day when the rain fell all of a sudden, she was obliged to let him come down-stairs with an umbrella. The rain having ceased almost immediately, she had sent him back when they reached the other side of the Pont Louis-Philippe. They had only remained a few moments beside the parapet, looking at the Mail, happy at being together in the open air. Below, moored against the quay, large barges full of apples were ranged four rows deep, so closely wedged together that the planks thrown across them made a continuous path for the women and children running to and fro. They felt amused at seeing this quantity of fruit, these enormous piles littering the banks, the round baskets being handed about, while a strong smell, almost a stench, a smell of cider in fermentation, mingled with the moist atmosphere of the river.

The week after that, when the sun again showed itself, and when Claude extolled the solitude of the quays around the Isle Saint Louis, she consented to take a walk. They strolled up the Quai de Bourbon and the Quai d'Anjou, stopping at every step, interested in the scenes of river life, in the dragger, whose buckets grated against their chains, in the floating wash-house, resounding with the noise of a quarrel, in a steam crane busy discharging a lighter. She, above all, did not cease to wonder. Was it possible that this Quai des Ormes, so rife with life opposite, that this Quai Henri IV., with its broad embankment and lower shore, where bands of children and dogs rolled over and over in the sand, that this horizon, that of an active, densely populated capital, was the same accursed perspective that had appeared to her for a moment in a gory flash on the night of her arrival?

They went round the point of the island, strolling

more leisurely still, to enjoy the solitude and tranquillity brought hither, as it were, by the old historic mansions. They watched the water seething between the wooden piles of the Estacade, and then returned by way of the Quai de Béthune and the Quai d'Orléans, feeling drawn closer to each other by the widening of the stream, keeping elbow to elbow at sight of the vast flow, with their eyes fixed on the distant Halle aux Vins and the Jardin des Plantes. In the pale sky, the cupolas of the public buildings assumed a bluish hue. When they reached the Pont St. Louis he had to point out Notre-Dame by name to her, for she did not recognize the monument from the rear, colossal and crouching down between its flying buttresses, which looked like sprawling paws, and dominated by the double head of its towers, above its long leviathan spine. Their find, that day, was the western point of the island, similar to the prow of a ship which is ever riding at anchor, and, floating between two swift currents, seems to be sighting Paris without being able to get into port. They went down some very steep steps, and discovered a solitary bank planted with lofty trees. It was a delicious refuge—a hermitage in the midst of a crowd. Paris was rumbling around, on the quays, on the bridges, while they on the water's edge felt the joy of being alone, ignored by the whole world. From that day forth this bank became their little rustic coign, their open-air resort, where they took advantage of the sunny hours when the great heat of the studio, where the red-hot stove kept roaring, oppressed them too much, and began to heat their hands with a fever of which they were afraid.

Nevertheless, Christine had so far objected to be accompanied farther than the Mail. At the Quai des Ormes she always bade Claude go back, as if Paris, with her crowds and possible encounters, began at

this long stretch of quays which she had to traverse on her way home. But Passy was so far off, and she felt so dull at having to go such a distance alone, that gradually she gave way. She began by allowing Claude to see her as far as the Hôtel de Ville; then as far as the Pont-Neuf; at last as far as the Tuileries. She forgot the danger; they walked arm in arm like a young married couple; and this constantly repeated promenade, this leisurely journey over the self-same ground by the riverside, became invested with an infinite charm, a happiness such as scarcely to leave scope for a more perfect one in after times. They truly belonged to each other, though they had not erred. It seemed as if the very soul of the great city, rising from the river, wrapped them around with all the tenderness that had throbbed behind the gray stone walls across the lapse of ages.

Since the nipping colds of December, Christine only came in the afternoon, and it was about four o'clock, when the sun was sinking, that Claude escorted her back on his arm. On days when the sky was clear, the moment they had crossed the Pont Louis-Philippe, the long line of quays stretched away immense into space. From one end to the other the slanting sun powdered the houses on the right bank with a golden dust, while, on the left, the islets, the buildings, stood out in a black line against the blazing glory of the sunset. Between the sombre and the brilliant margin, the spangled river sparkled, cut in twain every now and then by the elongated bars of its bridges; the five arches of the Pont Notre-Dame showing under the single span of the Pont d'Arcole, then the Pont-au-Change and the Pont-Neuf, each displaying beyond its own shadow a luminous patch, a sheet of bluish satin, growing paler here and there as if reflected in a mirror. And while the dusky outlines on the left terminated in the silhouette of the pointed towers of

the Palais de Justice, sharply drawn against the sky, a gentle curve undulated to the right, stretching away so far that the Pavillon de Flore, standing forth like a citadel, seemed a fairy castle, bluey, dreamlike and vague, amidst the rosy mist on the horizon. But Claude and Christine, with the sunlight streaming on them, under the leafless plane trees, turned away from the dazzlement, preferring to gaze at certain spots, one above all—a block of old houses just above the Mail. In front, below, there was a series of one-storied tenements, little huckster and fishing-tackle shops, with flat terrace roofs, ornamented with laurel and Virginia creeper. And in the rear rose loftier, but decrepit dwellings, with linen hung out to dry at their windows, a collection of fantastic structures, a confused mass of woodwork and masonry, walls over-toppling, and hanging gardens, where colored glass balls shone out like stars. They walked on, leaving behind them the bare walls of the barracks and the Hôtel de Ville, feeling much more interest in the Cité across the river, pent up between its lofty smooth embankments rising from the water. Above the darkened houses rose the towers of Notre-Dame, as resplendent as if they had been newly gilt. Then the second-hand bookstalls began to invade the quays; down below a lighter full of charcoal was struggling against the strong current beneath an arch of the Pont Notre-Dame. And then, on the days when the flower market was held, they stopped, despite the inclement weather, to inhale the scent of the first violets and the early gillyflowers. On their left the bank became visible for a long stretch; beyond the pepper-caster turrets of the Palais de Justice, the small, murky tenements of the Quai de l'Horloge showed as far as the clump of trees midway across the Pont-Neuf; then, as they went farther on, other quays emerged from the mist, in the far distance; the Quai Voltaire,

the Quai Malaquais, the dome of the Institute of France, the square building of the Mint, a long gray line of frontages of which they could not even distinguish the windows, a promontory of roofs, which, with their stacks of chimney-pots, looked like a rugged cliff, dipping down in a phosphorescent sea. In front, however, the Pavillon de Flore was divested of its dreamy aspect, and became solidified in the final sun blaze. Then right and left, on either bank of the river, came the long vistas of the Boulevard de Sébastopol and the Boulevard du Palais, the handsome new buildings of the Quai de la Mégisserie, with the new Prefecture of Police across the water; and the old Pont-Neuf, with its statue of Henri IV. looking like a splash of ink; the Louvre, the Tuileries, followed, and beyond Grenelle there was a far stretching perspective, the slopes of Sèvres, the country bathed in a stream of sun rays. Claude never went farther. Christine always made him stop just before they reached the Pont Royal, near the fine trees beside Vigier's swimming baths, and when they turned round to shake hands once more in the golden sunset now flashing into crimson, they looked back and on the horizon espied the Isle Saint Louis, whence they had come, the indistinct extremity of the capital which night was already reaching, under the slate-tinted eastern sky.

Ah! what splendid sunsets they beheld during these weekly strolls. The sun accompanied them, as it were, amid the throbbing gayety of the quays, the life of the river, the dancing ripples of the currents' amid the attraction of the shops, heated like conservatories, the potted flowers of the seed merchants, and the noisy cages displayed in front of the bird fanciers, amid all the din of sound and wealth of color which make the waterside the ever youthful part of cities. As they proceeded, the ardent blaze of the western

sky became purple on their left, above the dark line of houses, and the orb of day seemed to wait for them, gradually getting lower, slowly rolling towards the distant roofs, when once they had passed the Pont Notre-Dame in front of the widening stream. In no ancient forest, on no mountain road, beyond no grassy plain will there ever be such triumphal sunsets as behind the cupola of the Institute. It is Paris retiring to rest in her glory. At each of their walks the aspect of the conflagration changed; fresh furnaces added their glow to the crown of flames. One evening, when a shower surprised them, the sun, showing behind the downpour, lit up the whole rain cloud, and upon their heads there fell a spray of inflamed water, irisated with pink and azure. On the days when the sky was clear, however, the sun, like a fiery ball, descended majestically in an unruffled sapphire lake; for a moment the black cupola of the Institute impinged its shape and made it look like the waning moon; then the globe took a violet tinge and was submerged at last in the lake that had become blood-red. Already, in February, the planet described a wider curve, and fell straight into the Seine, which seemed to seethe on the horizon as at the contact of red-hot iron. However, the grander scenes, the vast fairy pictures of space, only blazed on cloudy evenings. Then, according to the whim of the wind, there were seas of sulphur splashing against coral reefs; there were palaces and towers, marvels of architecture, piled upon each other, burning and crumbling with torrents of lava streaming from between their gaps; or else the orb which had disappeared, hidden behind a veil of clouds, suddenly transpierced the rampart with such a press of light that shafts of sparks shot forth, starting from one horizon to the other, and as plainly visible as a volley of golden arrows. And then the twilight fell, and they said good-bye to each other,

with their eyes still full of the final dazzlement. They felt that this triumphal Paris was the accomplice of the joy which they could not exhaust, though ever resuming together this promenade along the old stone parapets.

One day, however, there happened what Claude had always secretly feared. Christine no longer seemed to believe in the possibility of meeting some one who knew her. In fact, was there such a person? She would always pass along like this, remaining altogether unknown. He, however, thought of his friends, and at times felt a kind of tremor when he fancied he recognized in the distance the back of some acquaintance. He was troubled by a feeling of delicacy; the idea that some one might stare at the young girl, approach them, and perhaps joke, gave him intolerable worry. And that very evening, as she was close beside him on his arm, and they were approaching the Pont des Arts, he fell upon Sandoz and Dubuche, who were coming down the steps of the bridge. Impossible to avoid them, they were almost face to face, besides, his friends must have seen him, for they smiled. Claude, very pale, kept advancing, and he thought it all up, on seeing Dubuche take a step towards him; but Sandoz was already holding the architect back, and he led him away. They passed on with an indifferent air and disappeared into the court-yard of the Louvre without as much as turning round. They had both just recognized the original of the pastel sketch, which the painter hid with the jealousy of a lover. Christine, chattering away, had noticed nothing. Claude, his heart bumping, answered her in monosyllables, moved to tears, brimming over with gratitude to his old chums for their discreet behavior.

A few days later on he had another shock. He did not expect Christine, and had made an appointment with Sandoz; then as she had run up to spend an hour—it

was one of those surprises that delighted them—they had just withdrawn the key, as usual, when there came a familiar knock with the fist on the door. Claude at once recognized the rap, and felt so upset at the mishap that he overturned a chair. After that it was impossible to pretend to be out. But she had turned so pale. She implored him with such a wild gesture that he remained rooted to the spot, holding his breath. The knocks continued, and a voice called out, "Claude, Claude." He still did not stir, debating with himself, however, with ashen lips and downcast eyes. There was a great silence, and then the footsteps went down, making the stairs creak. Claude's breast heaved with intense sadness; he felt it bursting with remorse at the sound of each retreating step, as if he had denied the friendship of his whole youth.

However, one afternoon there came another knock, and Claude had only time to whisper despairingly: "The key has been left in the door."

In fact, Christine had forgotten to take it out. She became scared and darted behind the screen, where she dropped on the side of the bed, with her handkerchief over her mouth to stifle the sound of her breathing.

The knocks became louder, there was a burst of laughter, and the painter had to cry: "Come in."

He felt more uncomfortable still when he saw Jory, who gallantly ushered in Irma Bécot. For the last fortnight Fagerolles had relinquished her to him, or, rather, he had resigned himself to the girl's whim, lest he might lose her altogether. She was then flinging her youth about the Paris studios, with her blood in such a craze that she changed quarters every week, though that did not prevent her from returning to her abandoned idol for a still shorter period if the whim took her.

"It is she who insisted upon seeing your studio, so I brought her," explained the journalist.

But the girl, without waiting, was already walking about and making remarks, with perfect freedom of manner. "Oh! how funny it is here. And what funny painting. That's a dear, show me everything. I want to see everything. And where do you sleep?"

Claude, apprehensively anxious, was afraid of her pushing the screen aside. He pictured Christine behind it, and felt distracted already at what she might hear.

"You know what she has come to ask of you?" resumed Jory, cheerfully. "What, don't you remember? You promised that she should pose for something. And she'll pose for whatever you like, won't you, dear?"

"Of course I will. And at once if you like."

"The fact is," said Claude in an embarrassed tone, "my picture will take up all my time till the Salon. I have a figure in it that gives me a deal of trouble. It's impossible to perfect it with those confounded models."

She had stuck herself in front of the picture, and lifted her pert little nose with a knowing air.

"That woman in the grass. Well, I say, do you think I could be of any use to you?"

Jory flared up in a moment.

"Well! that's not a bad idea. You are looking for a fine girl and can't find one."

Irma was already taking off her hat with one hand, while the other was fumbling with the hooks and eyes of her dress-body, in spite of the energetic refusals of Claude, who was struggling as if they were assaulting him.

"No, no, it's useless. Madame is too slight. She is not at all what I want; not at all."

"What does it matter?" said Irma. "You can always see."

And Jory insisted also.

"Let her show you. You are doing her a favor. She does not pose generally. She has no need to do so, but it's a pleasure for her to show her figure."

Claude succeeded at last in preventing her from posing. He stammered out excuses. He would be only too pleased later on, but just now he was afraid that another model would quite complete his confusion; and she merely shrugged her shoulders, looking fixedly at him with her pretty, vicious eyes, with an air of smiling contempt.

Then Jory chatted about their friends. Why had not Claude been at Sandoz's on the previous Thursday? One never saw him now. Dubuche asserted that he was being kept away by an actress. There had been a row between Fagerolles and Mahoudeau on the subject of evening dress and its fitness for being reproduced in sculpture. On the previous Sunday Gagnière had returned home from a Wagner concert with a black eye. He, Jory, had nearly had a duel at the Café Baudequin on account of one of his last articles in "The Drummer." The fact was he was giving it hard to the painters with the usurped reputations. The campaign against the hanging committee of the Salon was making a devil of a row; not a shred would be left of these guardians of the ideal, who wanted to prevent nature from entering.

Claude listened to him with impatient irritation. He had taken up his palette and shuffled about in front of his picture. The other one understood at last.

"You want to work, we'll leave you."

Irma continued to stare at the painter, with her vague smile, astonished at the stupidity of this simpleton, who did not care for her, and seized despite herself with a whim to please him. His studio was ugly,

and he himself wasn't handsome; but why should he affect goodness? Subtle and intelligent, certain of making her way, with her free and easy youthful manners, she chaffed him for a moment, and on going off she again offered to sit for him, emphasizing her offer by a long and warm pressure of his hand.

"Whenever you like," were her parting words.

They were gone at last, and Claude was obliged to put the screen aside, for Christine, looking very white, remained seated on the edge of the bed, as if she lacked the strength to rise. She did not say a word about the girl, but simply declared that she had been very much frightened; and she wanted to go at once—trembling lest there should be another knock—carrying away with her, in her startled looks, the trouble of many things she did not mention.

In fact, for many a day this sphere of brutal art, this studio full of glaring pictures, had caused her a feeling of discomfort. Wounded, full of repugnance, she could not get used to the academic studies, to the crude realism of the sketches brought back from Provençe. Having grown up in the affectionate admiration of a different style of art—her mother's fine water-colors, those fans of dreamy delicacy, in which lilac-tinted couples floated about in bluey gardens—she quite failed to understand Claude's work. Even now she often amused herself by painting tiny girlish landscapes, two or three subjects repeated over and over again—a lake with a ruin, a water mill beating a stream, a châlet, and pine trees, white with snow. And she felt surprised that an intelligent young fellow should paint in such an unreasonable manner, so ugly and so untrue besides. For she not only thought this realism monstrously ugly, but considered it as beyond every permissible truth. In fact, she considered he must be mad.

One day Claude absolutely insisted upon seeing a small sketch-book she had brought away from Cler-

mont, and which she had spoken about. After objecting for a long while, she brought it with her, flattered at heart and feeling very curious to know what he would say. He turned its leaves, smiling all the while, and as he did not speak, she was the first to ask:

"You think it very bad, don't you?"

"Not at all," he replied. "It's innocent."

The word hurt her, despite Claude's indulgent tone, which aimed at making it amiable.

"Well, you see I had so few lessons from mamma. I like painting to be well done and pleasing."

Thereupon he burst into frank laughter.

"Confess that my painting makes you feel ill. I have noticed it. You purse your lips, and open your eyes wide with fright. Certainly it is not the style of painting for ladies, least of all for young girls. But you'll get used to it; it's only a question of educating your eyes and you'll end by seeing that what I am doing is very honest and healthy."

Indeed, Christine gradually became used to it. But, at first, artistic conviction had nothing to do with the change, especially as Claude, with his contempt for female opinion, did not take the trouble to indoctrinate her. On the contrary, he avoided conversing about art with her, as if he wished to retain for himself this passion of his life apart from the new passion which was taking possession of him. Still, Christine glided into the habit of the thing, and became familiarized with it; she began to feel interested in these abominable pictures, on noticing the important place they held in the artist's existence. This was the first stage on the road to conversion; she felt moved in the presence of this rage to be up and doing, in the presence of this absolute consecration of one's whole being: was it not very touching? Was there not something very creditable in this? Then, when she beheld his joys and his sufferings, according to the success or the failure of the

day's work, she began to associate herself with his efforts. She became saddened when she found him sad, she grew cheerful when he received her cheerfully; and from that moment her preoccupation was—had he done a lot of work? Was he satisfied with what he had done since they had last seen each other? At the end of the second month she had been gained over; she stationed herself before the picture to judge whether it was progressing; she no longer felt afraid of it. She still did not particularly approve of this style of painting, but she began to repeat the artistic expressions she had heard him use; declared this bit to be "vigorous in tone," "well built up," or "just in the light it should be." He seemed to her so good-natured, and she was so fond of him, that after having found excuses for his daubing these horrors, she ended by discovering qualities in them in order to like them a little also.

Nevertheless, there was one picture, the large one, the one intended for the Salon, to which she could not reconcile herself for a long while. She already looked without dislike at the academic studies of the Boutin studio and the sketches of Plassans, but she was still irritated by the sight of the woman lying in the grass. It was like a personal grudge, the shame of having momentarily thought that she could detect a likeness of herself, a silent embarrassment at sight of this big figure which continued to wound her feelings, although she now found in it less and less of a likeness to herself. At first she had protested by averting her eyes. Now she remained for several minutes looking fixedly at it, in mute contemplation. How was it that the likeness had disappeared like that? In fact, the more vigorously that Claude struggled on, never satisfied, touching up the same bit a hundred times, the more the likeness to herself gradually faded away. And, without being able to account for it, without daring to admit as much to herself,

she, whose modesty had revolted the first day, now felt a growing sorrow at noticing that nothing of herself remained.

Indeed, she felt as if their friendship suffered from this obliteration; she felt herself further away from him at each trait that vanished. Didn't he care for her that he thus allowed her to be effaced from his work? And who was this new woman, this unknown indistinct face that penetrated from beneath hers?

Claude, in despair at having spoilt the figure's head, did not know exactly how to ask her for a few hour's sitting. She would have merely had to sit down; he would have only taken some hints. But he had previously seen her so pained that he felt afraid of irritating her again. And moreover, after promising himself to ask her in a gay, off-hand way, he had been at a loss for words, feeling all at once ashamed, as if something unbecoming had been in question.

One afternoon he quite upset her by one of those bursts of anger which he found it impossible to control, even in her presence. Everything had gone wrong that week; he talked of scraping his canvas again, and he paced up and down, beside himself, and kicking the furniture about. Then, all of a sudden, he caught her by the shoulders and made her sit down on the couch.

"I beg of you, do me this favor, or it'll kill me, I swear."

Dismayed, she did not understand him.

"What—what is it you want?"

Then when she saw him take up his brushes, she added, without heeding what she said: "Ah, yes! your work. Why did not you ask me before?"

And of her own accord she threw herself back on a cushion and slid her arm under her neck. But surprise and confusion at having yielded so quickly made her grave, for she did not know that she was

prepared for this kind of thing, indeed, she could have sworn that she would never serve him as a model again.

He, quite delighted, exclaimed: "Really, you consent! Dash it all! What a blooming fine woman I'll turn out with you!"

Again, speaking without reflection, she let these words escape her: "Oh! only the head!"

Whereupon, with the haste of a man who fears he has gone too far, he stammered: "Of course! only the head!"

A mutual feeling of embarrassment kept them both silent. He began to paint, while she, looking upward and keeping still, felt confused at having uttered such a phrase. Her compliance already filled her with remorse, as if she were lending herself to something wrong by letting him impart her lineaments to this feminine monstrosity refulgent under the sun.

In two sittings, Claude worked in the head all right. He exulted with delight, and exclaimed that it was the best bit of painting he had ever done; and he was right, never had he thrown such a play of real light over such a lifelike face. Happy at seeing him so pleased, Christine also became gay, going as far as to express approval of her head, which was still not very like, but which had a wonderful expression. They stood a long while before the picture, blinking at it, and drawing back as far as the wall.

"And now," he said at last, "I'll finish her off with a model. Ah! the hussy, so I've got her at last."

In a burst of childish glee, he took the young girl round the waist, and they performed "a triumphant war dance," as he called it. She laughed very heartily, fond of romping as she was, and no longer feeling aught of her trouble, scruples and discomfort.

But the very next week Claude became gloomy again. He had chosen Zoé Piédefer to pose for the

body, and she did not supply what he wanted; the delicate head, so he said, didn't set well on her shoulders. He, nevertheless, persisted, scratched out, began anew, and worked so hard that he lived in a constant state of fever. Towards the middle of January, seized with despair, he abandoned his picture and turned it against the wall, swearing that he would not finish it. Then, a fortnight later, he began to work at it again with another model, tall Judith, which obliged him to change the whole tone of it. Matters became still worse; he sent for Zoé again; became altogether at sea, and quite ill with uncertainty and anguish. And the pity of it was that this central figure alone worried him, for the rest of the painting—the trees of the background, the two little women, the gentleman in the velvet coat, finished and vigorous—fully satisfied him. February was drawing to a close; he had only a few days left to send his picture to the Salon; it was quite a disaster.

One evening, in Christine's presence, he began to swear, and launched forth this cry of anger: "After all, by the thunder of heaven, can one stick one woman's head on another's body! I ought to chop my hand off."

From the depths of his heart a single idea now mounted: to obtain her consent to pose for the whole figure. It had slowly sprouted, first as a simple wish, quickly discarded as absurd; then had come a silent, constantly-renewed debate with himself; and at last the desire, keen and definite, under the lash of necessity. It was she whom he wanted; she alone would realize his dream, and he beheld her again in her youthful freshness, beaming, indispensable to him. If he could not get her to pose, he might as well give up his picture, for no one else would satisfy him. While he remained seated for hours, distracted in front of this unfinished picture, so utterly powerless that he no

longer knew where to give a stroke of the brush, he formed heroic resolutions. The moment she came in he would throw himself at her feet; he would tell her his troubles in such touching words that she would, perhaps, yield. But when he beheld her, with her frank laughter of good fellowship, in her chaste dress which revealed nothing of her figure, he lost all courage, he averted his eyes lest she might surprise him trying to detect the supple curve of her torso under her dress-body. Such a request would be madness. One could not expect such a service from a friend; he would never have the audacity to ask.

Nevertheless, one evening as he was getting ready to accompany her, and as she was putting on her bonnet, her arms uplifted, they remained for a moment looking into each other's eyes, he quivering before her, she suddenly becoming so grave, so pale, that he felt himself detected. Twice afterwards he again read in her looks that she was aware of his all-absorbing thought. In fact, since he dreamt about it, she had begun to do the same, in spite of herself, her attention roused by his involuntary allusions. They scarcely affected her at first though she was obliged at last to notice them; still, she did not think it necessary to be on the defensive, for the question seemed to her to be beyond the range of possibility, to be one of those unavowable ideas which people do not even speak of. The fear that he would dare to ask her did not even come to her. It was simple madness. Never, never!

Days went by, and between them the fixed idea grew. The moment they were together they could not help thinking of it. Not a word was broached about it, but their very silence was full of it; they no longer made a movement, no longer exchanged a smile without stumbling upon this thought, impossible to shape into words, but of which their minds were brimful. Soon there was nothing left but that

in their fraternal companionship. And what they had so far avoided, the trouble of their intimacy, the awakening of the man and the woman in their frank comradeship, burst forth at last under this constant evocation that haunted them both. Little by little they became sensible of a secret fever of which they had hitherto been ignorant. Heat rose to their cheeks; they colored merely because their hands brushed against each other. Henceforth a never-ceasing excitement seemed to be lashing their blood; and amid this seizure of their whole being, the anguish of what they thus kept unspoken, but which they could not hide from each other, became such as to almost stifle them, their chests swelling with big sighs.

Towards the middle of March, Christine, at one of her visits, found Claude seated before his picture crushed with sorrow. He had not even heard her come in. He remained motionless, his vacant and haggard eyes staring at his unfinished work. In another three days the delay for sending in exhibits for the Salon would expire.

"Well?" she inquired gently, after standing a long time behind him, grief-stricken at seeing him in despair.

He started and turned round.

"Well, it's all up. I shan't exhibit anything this year! Ah! I who counted so much upon this Salon!"

Both relapsed into their despondency—a despondency agitated by vast, confused thoughts. Then she resumed, thinking aloud as it were:

"There would still be time."

"Time? Oh! no, indeed. It would want a miracle. Where am I to find a model so late in the day? Do you know, since this morning I have been worrying, and for a moment I thought I had hit upon an idea. Yes, it would be to go and fetch that girl, that Irma who came while you were here. I know well enough that she is small and plump, and that I should, perhaps,

have to change everything once more; but she's young, and there may be a possibility of making her do. Decidedly, I'll try her—"

He stopped short. The burning eyes with which he gazed at her clearly said: "Ah! there's you! ah! it would be the awaited miracle, the certain triumph, if you made this supreme sacrifice for me. I beseech you, I ask you devoutly, as a friend, the dearest, the most beauteous, the most pure."

She, erect, looking very pale, seemed to hear each word; and his ardently beseeching eyes exercised power over her. Without hastening, she took off her bonnet and cloak; then, simply, she continued in the same calm manner to prepare completely for the pose. She had not uttered a word; she seemed to be elsewhere, as of an evening, when, in her room and lost in dreams, she mechanically prepared to retire without paying the least attention. Why let a rival give her body when she herself had already given her face? She wished to be there entirely, at home in her affection, understanding at last the jealous disquietude this monster had caused her for so long a while. And still silent, she stretched herself on the couch, took up the pose, one arm under her head, her eyes closed.

Startled, motionless with delight, he watched her. At last he had found it again—the sudden vision so often evoked, it had started into life once more. She looked in part a child, still lank, but so lithe, so fresh in her youthfulness, and again he wondered. But he did not speak a word; he began to paint in the deep, solemn silence that had fallen upon them. For two long hours he stood to his work with such manly energy that he finished right off a superb roughing out of the whole figure. Never had woman's flesh intoxicated him like this, so vividly did it seem to beam in the light. His heart beat as if in the presence of some saintly figure. He did not approach, but

remained wondering at the transfiguration of the face, the somewhat massive sensual jaws of which seemed to have faded away beneath the gentle peacefulness of the brow and cheeks. During the two hours she did not stir, she did not speak, but made the sacrifice without a tremor, without any apparent embarrassment. Both felt, however, that if they said but one word a great shame would fall upon them. However, from time to time she opened her clear eyes, fixed them on some vague, distant point, remained thus for a moment, without his being able to read her thoughts in them, then closed them again, and relapsed into the lifelessness of fine marble, with the mysterious fixed smile required by the pose.

With a gesture Claude apprised her that he had finished, and his awkwardness coming back to him, he upset a chair in order to turn his back the quicker, while Christine, very red, rose from the couch. She dressed herself quickly, suddenly shivering, and in such a state of emotion that she fastened her dress all awry, pulling down her sleeves, and pulling up her collar, so as not to show the least strip of bare skin. And she was already dressed, muffled up in her cloak, while he, with his face still turned towards the wall, could not make up his mind to risk a glance. However, he drew near her at last; they gazed at each other for a moment or so, hesitating, overcome by an emotion which still prevented them from speaking. Was it sadness, then, unconscious, unnameable sadness? For their eyes grew swollen with tears, as if they had just spoilt their lives and dived to the depths of human misery. Then, softened and grieved, unable to think of anything, even of a word of thanks, he kissed her on the brow.

CHAPTER V.

THE SALON OF THE REJECTED.

ON the 15th of May, a Friday, Claude, who had returned at three o'clock in the morning from Sandoz's, was still asleep at nine, when Madame Joseph brought him up a large bouquet of white lilac which a commissionaire had just left down-stairs. He understood at once. Christine had wished to be beforehand in celebrating the success of his painting. For this was a great day for him, the opening day of the "Salon of the Rejected," which was first instituted that year, and where his picture—refused by the hanging committee of the official Salon—was to be exhibited.

This delicate attention on Christine's part, this fresh and fragrant lilac which roused him, affected him greatly, as if presaging a happy day. Still in his nightshirt, with his feet bare, he placed the flowers in his water-jug on the table. Then, with his eyes still swollen with sleep, almost bewildered, he dressed, scolding himself for having slept so long. The night before he had promised Dubuche and Sandoz to call for them at the latter's at eight o'clock, so that they might all three go together to the Palais de l'Industrie, where they would find the rest of the band. And he was already an hour behind time.

And, as luck would have it, he could not lay his hands upon anything in his studio, turned topsy-turvy since the dispatch of the big picture. For more than five minutes he hunted on his knees for

his shoes, among a lot of old chases. Particles of gold leaf flew about, for, not knowing where to get the money for a proper frame, he had four strips of board fitted together by a joiner of the neighborhood, and he had gilded them himself, with the assistance of his friend Christine, who, by-the-way, had proved a very unskilful gilder. At last, dressed, shod, his soft felt hat besprangled with yellow sparks, he was going off, when a superstitious thought brought him back to the nosegay, which had remained alone in the middle of the table. If he did not kiss the lilac he was sure to suffer an affront. So he kissed it and was perfumed by its strong springtide aroma.

Under the archway, he gave his key as usual to the doorkeeper. "Madame Joseph, I shall not be home all day."

In less than twenty minutes he was in the Rue d'Enfer, at Sandoz's. But the latter, whom he feared to have kept waiting, was equally late in consequence of a sudden indisposition of his mother. It was nothing. She had merely passed a bad night, but it had quite upset him with anxiety. Reassured by now, Sandoz told Claude that Dubuche had written not to wait for him, and giving an appointment at the Palais. They started, and as it was nigh upon eleven, they decided to breakfast in a deserted little crêmerie in the Rue St. Honoré, very leisurely, seized with laziness amid their ardent desire to see, and deriving a kind of sweet and tender sadness from lingering awhile among the recollections of their youth.

One o'clock was striking when they crossed the Champs Elysées. It was a lovely day, with a limpid sky, to which the breeze, still somewhat chilly, seemed to impart a brighter azure. Beneath the sun, of the tint of ripe corn, the rows of chestnut trees

showed their new foilage of a delicate green, and freshly varnished, as it were; the basins with their leaping sheafs of water, the well-kept lawns, the prolonged vistas of the pathways, and the extent of the open spaces, all lent an air of luxurious grandeur to the far-stretching scene. A few carriages, very few at this early hour, were ascending the avenue, while a stream of people, bewildered and bustling, like a swarm of ants, disappeared under the vast archway of the Palais de l'Industrie.

When they were inside, Claude felt a slight shiver in the gigantic vestibule, as cold as a cellar, and the damp pavement of which resounded beneath one's feet, like the flagstones of a church. He glanced right and left at the two monumental staircases, and asked contemptuously: "I say, are we going through their dirty Salon?"

"Oh! no, dash it!" answered Sandoz. "Let's cut through the garden. Over there, there's the western staircase that leads to 'the Rejected.'"

And they passed disdainfully between the two little tables of the catalogue vendors. Through the opening of the vast red velvet curtains, the garden, roofed in with glass, appeared beyond the shady porch. At that time of day it was almost deserted; there were only some people at the buffet under the clock, the throng of people lunching. The crowd was in the galleries on the first floor, and the white statues alone edged the yellow-sanded pathways which crudely intersected the green lawns. There was a whole population of motionless marble, transfixed in some attitude or other; an endless row of heads, legs, arms, pell-mell, bathed in the light falling from the glazed roof on high. Looking southwards, holland blinds barred half of the nave, amber in the sun-light and speckled at both ends by the dazzling blue and crimson of the stained glass windows. Just a few visitors, wearied

already, occupied the brand new chairs and seats, shiny with fresh paint; while the flights of sparrows, which had built their nests above, among the iron girders, swooped down, twittering as they pursued each other, and quite at home, raking up the sand.

Claude and Sandoz pretended to walk along very quickly, without giving a glance around them. A stiff classical bronze statue, the Minerva of a member of the Institute, had exasperated them at the very door. But as they hastened along past a seemingly endless line of busts, they recognized Bongrand, all alone, going slowly round a recumbent figure, colossal and overflowing, which had been placed in the middle of the path. His hands behind his back, quite absorbed, he bent his creased and wrinkled face every now and then over the plaster.

"Hallo, it's you?" he said, as they held out their hands to him. "I was just looking at the figure of our friend Mahoudeau, which they at least had the intelligence to admit, and to put in a good position." Then breaking off: "Have you been up-stairs?" he asked.

"No, we have just come in," said Claude.

Then Bongrand began to talk warmly about the Salon of the Rejected. He, who belonged to the Institute, but who lived apart from his colleagues, made very merry over the adventure; the everlasting discontent of painters; the campaign carried on by petty papers like "The Drummer;" the protestations, the constant complaints that had at last disturbed the Emperor and the artistic coup d'état carried out by this silent dreamer, for the measure was solely owing to him. Then the great painter alluded to all the scare, the hubbub, in consequence of this paving-stone flung into a frog's pond.

"No," he continued, "you have no idea of the indignant protests among the members of the hanging com-

mittee. And remember I'm distrusted; they generally keep quiet when I'm there. But they are all enraged with these horrible realists. It was to them that the doors of the temple were systematically closed; it is on account of them that the Emperor has allowed the public to revise the suit, and finally it is they who triumph. Ah! I hear some nice things; I wouldn't give a high price for your skins, youngsters."

He laughed his big, joyous laughter, extending his arms as if to embrace all the youth that he divined rising from the soil.

"Your disciples are growing," said Claude, simply.

With a wave of his hand, Bongrand, becoming embarrassed, silenced him. He himself had not sent anything for exhibition, and the prodigious mass of work amidst which he found himself—these pictures, these statues, these proofs of creative efforts—filled him with regret. It was not jealousy, for there lived not a more upright and better soul; but a kind of self-examination, a gnawing fear of impotence, an unavowed dread that haunted him.

"And at 'the Rejected?'" asked Sandoz; "how goes it there?"

"Superb; you'll see." Then turning towards Claude, keeping both his hands in his own: "You, my good fellow, you are a trump! Listen! they say I am clever; well, I'd give ten years of my life to have painted that big woman of yours!"

Praise like that, coming from such lips, moved the young painter to tears. Victory had come at last, then? He failed to find a word of thanks, and abruptly turned the conversation, wishing to hide his emotion.

"That good fellow Mahoudeau!" he said, "why, his figure's capital! He has a deuced fine temperament, hasn't he?"

Sandoz and Claude had begun to walk round the plaster figure. Bongrand replied with a smile:

"Yes, yes, there's too much development. But just look at the articulations, they are delicate and really pretty. Come, good-bye, I must leave you. I'm going to sit down awhile. My legs are bending under me."

Claude had raised his head to listen. A tremendous noise that had not struck him at first careered through the air with an incessant crash; it was like the din of the tempest, beating against the cliff, the rumbling of an untiring assault, dashing forward from endless space.

"Hallo, what's that?" he muttered.

"That," said Bongrand, as he walked away, "that's the crowd up-stairs in the galleries."

And the two young fellows, having crossed the garden, went up to the "Salon of the Rejected."

It had been installed in first-rate style. The officially-received pictures were not lodged more sumptuously: lofty hangings of old tapestry at the doors; "the line" set off with green baize; seats of crimson velvet; white linen screens under the large skylights of the roof; and all along the suite of galleries the first impression was the same—the same gilt frames, the same colors on the canvas. But there was a special kind of cheerfulness, a sparkling of youth which one did not altogether realize at first. The crowd, already compact, increased every minute, for the official Salon was being deserted. People came, stung by curiosity, impelled by a desire to judge the judges, and, above all, amused at the very threshold by the certainty that they were going to see some very diverting things. It was very hot; a fine dust arose from the flooring; and certainly, towards four o'clock, one would stifle there.

"Hang it!" said Sandoz, trying to elbow his way, "it will be no easy job to manœuvre about in there and find your picture."

He was eager to get to it, in a burst of fraternal feverishness. On that day he only lived for the work and glory of his old chum.

"Don't worry!" exclaimed Claude; "we shall get to it all right. My picture won't fly away."

And he affected not to be in a hurry, in spite of the almost irresistible desire he felt to run. He raised his head and looked around him; and soon, amidst the loud voices of the crowd that had bewildered him, he distinguished some slight, restrained laughter, which was almost drowned by the tramp of feet and the sound of conversation. Before certain pictures the public stood joking. This made him feel uneasy, for he was as sensitive and as credulous as a woman despite his revolutionary brutality, and always looked forward to martyrdom, ever grieved and ever stupefied at being always repulsed and railed at.

"They seem gay here!" he muttered.

"Well, there's good reason," remarked Sandoz. "Just look at those extravagant jades!"

At the same moment, while still lingering in the first gallery, Fagerolles ran up against them without seeing them. He started, being no doubt annoyed at the meeting. However, he recovered his composure immediately, and was very amiable.

"Hallo! I was just thinking of you. I have been here for the last hour."

"Where have they shoved Claude's picture?" asked Sandoz.

Fagerolles, who had just remained for twenty minutes in front of this picture, studying it and studying the impression it produced on the public, answered without wincing: "I don't know; I haven't been able to find it. We'll look for it together if you like."

And he joined them. Terrible wag as he was, he no longer affected low-bred manners to the same degree; he already began to dress well, and although with his

mocking nature still disposed to snap at everybody as of old, he pinched his lips into the serious expression of a fellow who wants to make his way in the world. He added with an air of conviction: "It's I who regret not having sent anything this year! I should be here with all of you, and have my share of success. And there are some astonishing things, my boys! These horses, for instance!"

He pointed to the huge canvas in front of them, before which the crowd was gathering and laughing. It was, so people said, the work of an erstwhile veterinary surgeon. A number of horses, life-size, in a meadow, fantastic horses, blue, violet and pink, and whose astonishing anatomy pierced their sides.

"I say, supposing you didn't humbug us," said Claude, suspiciously.

But Fagerolles pretended to be enthusiastic. "What do you mean? It's full of talent, that picture is. The fellow who painted it understands the horse devilish well. No doubt he paints like a brute. But what's the odds, if he's original and contributes a document?"

Fagerolles' delicate girlish face remained perfectly grave, and it was impossible to know whether he was joking. There was but the slightest yellow twinkle of spitefulness in the depths of his gray eyes. And he finished with a spiteful allusion, the drift of which was patent to himself alone as yet: "Ah, well! If you let yourself be influenced by the fools who laugh, you'll have enough to do by-and-bye."

The three comrades, who had begun walking again, only advanced with infinite trouble amid the surging shoulders. On entering the second gallery they gave a glance around the walls, but the picture they were seeking was not there. What they saw instead was Irma Bécot on the arm of Gagnière, both crushed against a hand-rail, he busy examining a small canvas,

while she, delighted at being hustled about, raised her pink nose and laughed at the crowd.

"Hallo!" said Sandoz, surprised, "so she's with Gagnière now?"

"Oh, merely a passing whim!" exclaimed Fagerolles, quietly. "One of the best things you ever heard. You know that she has just had a very swell apartment furnished for her. Yes, by that young idiot of a marquis, whom the papers talk about—you remember? She's a girl who'll make her way; I've always said so! But they may put her in bedsteads with crests carved on them as long as they like; she has a craze to sleep on truckle couches. There are times when she prefers the garret, come what may. And that's why, last Sunday night, giving everything else the go-by, she dropped into the Café Baudequin at one o'clock in the morning. We had just gone off, and there was only Gagnière left dozing over his beer, so she went off with Gagnière."

Irma had now seen them, and was making affectionate gestures from afar. They could but go to her. When Gagnière turned round, with his light hair and little, beardless face, looking more grotesque than ever, he did not show the least surprise at finding them at his back.

"It's wonderful!" he muttered.

"What's wonderful?" asked Fagerolles.

"This little masterpiece. And withal honest and naïf and full of conviction."

He pointed to a tiny canvas before which he had stood absorbed, an absolutely childish picture, such as an urchin of four might have painted: a little cottage at the edge of a little road, with a little tree beside it, the whole out of drawing, and girt round with black lines, even to the corkscrew imitation of smoke issuing from the roof.

Claude gave a nervous gesture, while Fagerolles repeated phlegmatically:

"Very delicate, very delicate. But your picture, Gagnière, where is it?"

"My picture, it is there."

In fact, the picture he had sent precisely happened to be near the little masterpiece. It was a landscape of a pearly gray, a bit of the Seine banks, painted carefully, pretty in tone, though somewhat heavy, and perfectly ponderated without any revolutionary roughness.

"To think that they were idiotic enough to refuse this," said Claude, who had approached with an air of interest. "But why, I ask you, why?"

"Because it's realistic," said Fagerolles, in so sharp a voice that one could not tell whether he was gibing at the jury or at the picture.

Meanwhile, Irma, of whom no one took any notice, was looking fixedly at Claude, with the unconscious smile which the savage loutishness of this big fellow brought to her lips. To think that he had not even tried to see her again. She found him so different from the last time she had seen him, so funny, not looking at all to advantage with his hair standing on end, and his face wan and sallow, as if he had had a severe fever. And pained that he did not seem to notice her, she wanted to draw his attention, and touched his arm with a familiar gesture.

"I say, isn't that one of your friends over there, looking for you?"

It was Dubuche, whom she knew from having seen him on one occasion at the Café Baudequin. He was, with difficulty, elbowing his way through the crowd, his eyes staring vaguely at the sea of heads. But all at once, when Claude was trying to make himself seen by gesticulating, the other turned his back to bow very low to a party of three—the father short

and fat, with a sanguine face; the mother very thin, the color of wax, and devoured by anæmia; the daughter so physically backward at eighteen that she retained the lank macilency of childhood.

"All right!" muttered the painter. "There he's caught! What ugly acquaintances the brute has! Where can he have fished up such horrors?"

Gagnière quietly said that he knew the strangers by sight. M. Margaillan was a great masonry contractor, already a millionaire five or six times over, who was making his fortune out of the great public works of Paris, running up whole boulevards on his own account. No doubt Dubuche had become acquainted with him through one of the architects he worked for.

But Sandoz, compassionating the scragginess of the young girl, whom he kept watching, judged her in one sentence:

"Ah! the poor little flayed kitten. One feels sorry for her."

"Let them alone!" exclaimed Claude, ferociously. "They have all the crimes of the middle classes stamped on their faces! It serves them right! But hallo! our runaway friend is making off with them. What grovellers architects are! Good riddance. He'll have to look for us when he wants us!"

Dubuche, who had not seen his friends, had just offered his arm to the mother, and was going off, explaining the pictures, his gestures typical of exaggerated politeness.

"Well, let's proceed then," said Fagerolles; and, addressing Gagnière, he asked: "Do you know where they have stowed Claude's picture?"

"I? No, I was looking for it—I am going with you."

He accompanied them, forgetting Irma Bécot against the "line." It was she who had wanted to visit the

Salon on his arm, and he was so little used to promenading a woman that he constantly lost her on the way, and was stupefied to find her again beside him, no longer knowing how or why they were thus together. She ran after them, and took his arm again to follow Claude, who was already passing into another gallery with Fagerolles and Sandoz.

Then the five roamed about in Indian file, their noses in the air, separated by a sudden crush, reunited by another one, and carried along by the stream. An abomination of Chaîne's, a "Christ Pardoning the Woman taken in Adultery," made them pause; it was a group of dry figures that looked like wood, of a bony build lending violet shades to the skin, and seemingly painted with mud. But close by they admired a very fine study of a woman, seen from behind, with her head turned round. The whole show was a mixture of the best and the worst, all styles were mingled together, the drivellers of the historical school elbowing the young lunatics of realism, the simpletons lumped together with those who bragged about their originality; a dead Jezabel, that seemed to have rotted away in the cellars of the School of Arts, exhibited near a lady in white, a very curious conception of a future great artist; a huge shepherd looking at the sea, a weak production facing a little painting of some Spaniards playing at rackets, a dash of light of splendid intensity. Nothing execrable was wanting, neither military scenes with little leaden soldiers, nor wan antiquity, nor the middle ages, smeared as it were with bitumen. But from amidst this incoherent ensemble, especially from the landscapes, all of which were painted in a sincere, correct key, and also from the portraits, mostly very interesting as regards workmanship, there came a good fresh odor of youth, bravery and passion. If there were fewer bad pictures in the official Salon, the average there

was assuredly more commonplace and mediocre. Here there was the smell of battle, of cheerful battle, given jauntily at daybreak, when the bugle sounds, and when one marches to meet the enemy with the certainty of beating him before sunset.

Claude, whose spirits had revived amidst this martial odor, grew animated and pugnacious as he listened to the laughter of the public, and looked defiant as if he had heard bullets whizzing past him. Sufficiently discreet at the entrance of the galleries, this laughter became more boisterous, more unrestrained, as they advanced. In the third room the women no longer concealed it behind their handkerchiefs, the men held their sides the better to ease themselves. It was the contagious hilarity of people come to amuse themselves, growing gradually excited, bursting out at a trifle, diverted as much by the good things as by the bad. Folks laughed less before Chaîne's Christ than before the woman whose starting from the canvas, as it were, seemed very comical indeed. The "Lady in White" also stupefied people and drew them together; folks nudged each other and went into hysterics almost; there was always a grinning group in front of it. And each canvas thus had its especial success; people hailed each other from a distance to point out something funny; witticisms constantly flew from mouth to mouth; to such a degree, indeed, that as Claude entered the fourth gallery, lashed into fury by the tempest of laughter that was raging there as well, he all but slapped the face of an old dame whose chuckles exasperated him.

"What idiots!" he said, turning towards his friends. "One feels inclined to throw a lot of masterpieces at their heads."

Sandoz had become fiery also, and Fagerolles continued to praise aloud the most dreadful daubs, which only tended to increase the laughter, while Gagnière,

at sea amid the noise, dragged along the delighted Irma, whose skirts somehow wound round all the men.

But all of a sudden Jory stood before them. His long pink nose, his fair, handsome face, absolutely beamed. He violently cut his way through the crowd, gesticulated, and exulted, as if over a personal victory. The moment he perceived Claude, he shouted:

"Here you are at last! I have been looking for you this hour! A success, old fellow, oh! a success!"

"Which success?"

"Why, the success of your picture! Come, I must show it you. You'll see, it's stunning!"

Claude grew pale. A great joy choked him, while he pretended to receive the news with composure. Bongrand's words came back to him. He began to believe that he possessed genius.

"Hallo, how are you?" continued Jory, shaking hands with the others.

And, without more ado, he, Fagerolles and Gagnière surrounded Irma, who smiled on them in a good-natured way.

"Perhaps you'll tell us where the picture is?" said Sandoz, impatiently. "Take us to it."

Jory assumed the lead, followed by the band. They had to fight their way into the last gallery. But Claude, who brought up the rear, still heard the laughter that rose on the air, a swelling clamor, the roll of the tide near its full. And as he finally entered the room, he beheld a vast, swarming, closely-packed crowd eagerly pressing in front of his picture. All the laughter arose, spread and ended there. And it was his picture that was being laughed at!

"Eh!" repeated Jory, triumphantly, "there's a success for you!"

Gagnière, intimidated, as ashamed as if he himself had been slapped, muttered:

"Too much of a success! I should prefer something different!"

"What a fool you are!" replied Jory, in a burst of exalted conviction. "That's what I call success! Does it matter a curse if they laugh? We have made our mark; to-morrow every paper will talk about us!"

"The idiots!" was all that Sandoz could gasp, choking with grief.

Fagerolles, disinterested and dignified like a family friend following a funeral procession, said nothing. And Irma alone remained gay, thinking it all very funny. Then, with a caressing gesture, she leant against the shoulder of the derided painter, and whispered softly in his ear:

"Don't fret, my boy. It's all humbug, be merry all the same."

But Claude did not stir. An icy chill had come over him. For a moment his heart had almost ceased to beat, so cruel had been the disappointment. And with his eyes enlarged, attracted and fixed by a resistless force, he looked at his picture. He was surprised, and scarcely recognized it; it certainly was not the same work it had seemed in his studio. It had grown yellow beneath the livid light of the linen screens; it seemed also to have become smaller, coarser and more labored at the same time; and whether it was the effect of the light in which it now hung, or the contrast of the works beside it, at all events he now saw at the first glance all its defects, after having remained blind, as it were, for months before it. With a few strokes of the brush he altered the whole of it, deepened the distances, sat a badly drawn limb right, and changed the value of a tone. Decidedly, the gentleman in the velveteen jacket was not worth anything at all, he was altogether impasted and badly seated; the only really good bit of work about him

was his hand. In the background the two little wrestlers—the fair and the dark one—had remained too sketchy, and lacked substance; they were amusing only to an artist's eye. But he was pleased with the trees, with the sunny glade; and the woman—the woman lying on the grass appeared to him superior to his own powers, as if some one else had painted her, and as if he had never yet beheld her in this resplendency of life.

He turned to Sandoz, and said simply:

"They are right to laugh; it's incomplete! Never mind, the woman is all right! Bongrand was not hoaxing me."

His friend wished to take him away, but he became obstinate, and drew closer instead. Now that he had judged his work, he listened and looked at the crowd. The explosion continued—culminated in an ascending scale of mad laughter. Already on the threshold he saw the jaws of the visitors part, their eyes grow small, their entire faces expand; and one heard the tempestuous puffing of the fat men, the rusty grating of the lean ones, dominated by the shrill, flute-like laughter of the women. Opposite him, against the hand-rails, some young fellows went into contortions, as if some one had been tickling them. One lady had flung herself on a seat, her knees close together, stifling and trying to regain breath with her handkerchief over her mouth. Rumors of this picture, so very funny, must be spreading, for there was a rush from the four corners of the Salon, bands arrived jostling each other, and bent on sharing the fun. "Where is it?" "Over there." "Oh, what a joke!" And the witticisms fell thicker here than elsewhere. It was especially the subject that caused merriment; people failed to understand; it was thought insane, comical enough to make one ill with laughter. "You see the lady feels too hot, while the gentleman has

put on his velveteen jacket for fear of catching cold." "Not at all; she is already blue; the gentleman has pulled her out of a pond, and he is resting at a distance, holding his nose." "The man isn't at all polite; he might have turned the other way." "I tell you it's a young ladies' school out for a ramble. Look at the two playing at leap-frog." "Hallo! washing day; the flesh is blue; the trees are blue; he's dipped his picture in the blueing tub!"

Those who did not laugh flew into a rage: this bluey tinge, this novel rendering of light seemed an insult to them. Some old gentlemen shook their sticks. Was art to be outraged like this? One grave individual went away very wroth, saying to his wife that he did not like practical jokes. But another, a punctilious little man, having looked in the catalogue for the title of the work, in order to tell his daughter, and reading out aloud, "'In the Open Air'," there came a formidable renewal of the clamor, hisses and shouts around him, and what not. The title sped about; it was repeated, commented on. "In the Open Air! ah, yes, the open air, the woman exposed to the air, everything in the air, tra la la laire." The affair was becoming a scandal. The crowd still increased. People's faces grew congestive in the growing heat, each with the stupidly gaping mouth of the ignoramus who judges painting, and the whole of them indulging in all the asinine ideas, all the preposterous reflections, all the stupid, spiteful jeers that the sight of an original work can elicit from middle-class imbecility.

At that moment, as a last blow, Claude beheld Dubuche reappear, dragging the Margaillans along. As soon as he came in front of the picture, the architect, ill at ease, taken with a cowardly shame, wished to quicken his pace, take his party further on, pretending he had seen neither the canvas nor his friends. But the contractor had already drawn

himself up on his short, squat legs, staring with all his might, and asking aloud in his thick hoarse voice:

"I say, who's the blockhead that painted this?"

This good-natured bluster, this cry of a millionaire parvenu resuming the average opinion, increased the merriment; and he, flattered by his success, tickled by the strange style of the painting, started off in his turn with such immoderate, sonorous laughter from the depths of his capacious chest, that he could be heard above all the others. It was the hallelujah, the final outburst of the great organ.

"Take my daughter away!" whispered pale-faced Madame Margaillan in Dubuche's ear.

He sprang forward, disengaged Régine, who had drooped her eyelids, from the crowd, and displayed as much muscular energy as if it had been a question of saving the poor creature from imminent death. Then having taken leave of the Margaillans at the door, with a deal of handshaking and the bows of a man of society, he came towards his friends, and said straightway to Sandoz, Fagerolles and Gagnière:

"What would you have? It isn't my fault. I warned him that the public would not understand. It's risky; yes, you may say what you like, it's risky."

"They hissed Delacroix," broke in Sandoz, white with rage, and clenching his fists. "They hissed Courbet. Oh, the race of enemies, the hangman's idiocy!"

Gagnière, who now shared this artistic vindictiveness, grew angry at the recollection of his Sunday battles at the Pasdeloup Concerts in favor of real music.

"And they hiss Wagner; they are the same crew. I recognize them! You see that fat fellow over there—"

Jory had to hold him back. The journalist would rather have egged on the crowd. He kept on repeating that it was famous, that there was a hundred

thousand francs' worth of advertisements in it. And Irma, left to her own devices once more, had just met two of her friends, young Stock Exchange men who were among the most persistent scoffers, but whom she began to indoctrinate, forcing them, as it were, into admiration, by rapping them on the knuckles.

Fagerolles, however, had not opened his lips. He kept on examining the picture, and gave glances at the crowd. With his Parisian instinct and the elastic conscience of a skilful fellow, he at once fathomed the misunderstanding. He was already vaguely conscious of what was wanted for that style of painting to make the conquest of everybody, a little trickery perhaps, some attenuations, a different choice of subject, a milder way of execution. The influence that Claude had had over him persisted in making itself felt; he remained imbued with it; it had set its stamp upon him forever.

Only he considered Claude to be an arch idiot to have exhibited such a thing. Wasn't it stupid to believe in the intelligence of the public? What was the use of this woman beside this gentleman fully dressed? What did those two little wrestlers in the background mean? And yet the picture evinced the qualities of a master. There wasn't another bit of painting like it in the Salon! And he felt a great contempt for this artist, so admirably endowed, who made all Paris roar as if he had been the worst of daubers.

This contempt became so strong that he was unable to hide it. In a moment of irresistible frankness he exclaimed:

"Look here, my dear fellow, it's your own fault, you are too stupid."

Claude, turning his eyes from the crowd, looked at him in silence. He had not winced, only turned pale amidst the laughter, his lips quivering with a slight nervous twitching; nobody knew him, it was his work

alone that was being buffeted. Then for a moment he glanced again at his picture, and slowly inspected the other canvases in the gallery. And in the collapse of his illusions, in the bitter agony of his pride, a breath of courage, a whiff of health and youth came to him from all this gayly-brave painting, mounting to the assault of classical conventionality with such headlong passion. He was consoled and inspirited by it; he felt no remorse or contrition, but, on the contrary, was impelled to clash against the public still more. No doubt there was a deal of clumsiness and some very puerile efforts, but on the other hand what a pretty general tone, what a play of light he had thrown into it, a silvery gray light, fine and diffused, brightened by all the dancing sunbeams of the open air. It was like a window suddenly opened amidst the old style of bituminous cookery, amidst the stewing juices of tradition, and the sun came in and the walls smiled under this invasion of a spring morning. The light note of his picture, the bluey tinge people had been railing at, flashed out among the other paintings. Was it not the expected dawn, a new aurora rising on art? He perceived a critic who had stopped without laughing, some celebrated painters looking surprised and grave, Papa Malgras, very dirty, going from picture to picture with the pout of a wary connoisseur, and stopping short in front of his canvas, motionless, absorbed. Then Claude turned round to Fagerolles, and surprised him by his tardy reply:

"A fellow can only be an idiot according to his own lights, my dear fellow, and it looks as if I were going to remain one. So much the better for you if you are clever!"

Fagerolles at once patted him on the shoulder, like a chum who had only been in fun, and Claude allowed Sandoz to take his arm. They led him off at last. The whole band left the "Salon of the Rejected,"

deciding that they would go through the gallery of architecture; for a plan for a museum by Dubuche had been accepted, and for a moment he had been fidgeting about and begging with so humble a look that it seemed difficult indeed to deny him this satisfaction.

"Ah! said Jory, jocularly, on entering the gallery, "what an ice cellar. One can breathe here."

They all took off their hats and wiped their foreheads, with a feeling of relief, as if they had reached a shady spot after a long march in full sunlight. The gallery was empty. From the roof, shaded by a white linen vellarium, there fell a soft, even, rather sad light reflected like quiescent water in the well-waxed, mirror-like floor. On the four walls, of a faded red, the plans, the large and small chases, edged with pale blue borders, displayed the washed-in patches of their water color tints. Alone—absolutely alone—amidst this desert stood a hirsute gentleman, lost in deep contemplation before the plan of a charity home. Three ladies who appeared became frightened and fled across the gallery with hasty, little steps.

Dubuche was already showing and explaining his work to his comrades. It was only one drawing, a modest little museum gallery, which he had sent in with ambitious haste, contrary to custom and against the wish of his employer, who, nevertheless, had used his influence to have it accepted, thinking himself pledged to do so.

"Is your museum intended for the accommodation of the paintings of the 'Open Air' school?" asked Fagerolles, very gravely.

Gagnière pretended to admire the plan, nodding his head, but thinking of something else; while Claude and Sandoz examined it and sincerely interested themselves in it.

"Not bad, old boy," said the former. "The ornamentation is still traditional; but never mind; it does."

Jory, becoming impatient at last, cut him short:

"Come along, let's go, eh? I'm catching my death of cold."

The band resumed its march. The worst was that to make a short cut they had to cross the whole of the official Salon, and they resigned themselves to doing so, notwithstanding the oath they had taken not to set their feet in it, as a matter of protest. Cutting through the crowd, keeping themselves rigidly erect, they followed the suite of galleries, casting indignant glances to their right and left. There was none of the gay scandal of their Salon, fresh tones and exaggerated sunlight. Gilt frames full of shadows succeeded each other; black, pretentious things, academical studies showing yellow in the cellar-like light, all the classical frippery, history, genre style, landscape, all dipped in the same conventional black grease. The works reeked with uniform mediocrity, with the muddy dinginess of the tone that characterized them, despite their primness, that of an art with poor and degenerate blood. And the friends quickened their steps: they ran to escape from this reign of bitumen still existent, condemning everything in a lump with their magnificent sectarian injustice, repeating that there was nothing worth looking at—nothing, nothing!

At last they emerged, and they were going down into the garden when they met Mahoudeau and Chaîne. The former threw himself into Claude's arms.

"Ah, my dear fellow, your picture; what artistic temperament!"

The painter at once began to praise the "Vintaging Girl."

"And you, I say, you have thrown a nice big lump at their heads!"

But the sight of Chaîne, to whom no one spoke

about the "Woman taken in Adultery," and who was silently wandering round, awakened Claude's compassion. He thought there was something very sad about this execrable painting, and the wasted life of this peasant, the victim of middle-class admiration. He always gave him the delight of a little praise; so now he shook his hand cordially, exclaiming:

"Your machine's very good, too—ah, my fine fellow, draughtsmanship has no terrors for you!"

"No, indeed," declared Chaîne, who had grown purple with vanity under his black, bushy beard.

He and Mahoudeau joined the band, and the latter asked the others whether they had seen Chambouvard's "Sower." It was marvellous; the only piece of statuary worth looking at in the Salon. And they all followed him into the garden, which the crowd was now invading.

"There," said Mahoudeau, stopping in the middle of the central path: "Chambouvard is standing just in front of his 'Sower.'"

In fact, a portly man stood there, solidly planted on his fat legs, and admiring his handiwork. His head sunk between his shoulders, he had the thick, handsome features of a Hindoo idol. He was said to be the son of a veterinary surgeon of the neighborhood of Amiens. At forty-five he had already produced twenty masterpieces: simple and living statues, quite modern in their anatomy, kneaded into shape by a workman of genius, without any pretension to refinement; and all this was chance production, for he furnished work as a field bears harvest, good one day, bad the next, in absolute ignorance of what he created. He carried the lack of critical acumen to such a degree that he made no distinction between the most glorious offspring of his hands and the detestably grotesque figures which he happened to put together now and then. Never troubled with nervous feverish-

ness, never doubting, always solid and convinced, he had the pride of a god.

"Wonderful, 'The Sower,'" whispered Claude; "what a figure and what an attitude!"

Fagerolles, who had not looked at the statue, was highly amused by the great man, and the string of young, open-mouthed disciples he generally dragged at his heels.

"Just look at them, one would think they are taking the sacrament, 'pon my word—and he himself, eh? What a good, brutish face!"

Isolated, and at his ease, amidst the general curiosity, Chambouvard stood there wondering, with the stupefied air of a man surprised at having produced such a masterpiece. He seemed to behold it for the first time, and was unable to get over his astonishment. Then an expression of delight stole gradually over his broad face; he nodded his head, and burst into soft, irresistible laughter, repeating a dozen times: "It's comical, it's really comical!"

His train of followers went into raptures, while he himself could find nothing more forcible to express how much he worshipped himself. All at once there was a slight stir. Bongrand, who had been walking about, his hands behind his back, glancing vaguely around him, had just stumbled on Chambouvard, and the public, drawing back, whispered, and watched with interest the two celebrated artists shaking hands; the one short and of a sanguine temperament: the other tall and restless. Some expressions of good fellowship were overheard. "Always fresh marvels." "Of course! and you, nothing this year?" "No, nothing; I am resting, looking for—" "Come, you joker! There's no need to look, the thing comes by itself." "Good-bye." "Good-bye." And Chambouvard, followed by his court, was already moving slowly away among the crowd, with the glances of a

king, happy to live, while Bongrand, who had recognized Claude and his friends, approached them with outstretched, feverish hands, and pointed to the sculptor with a nervous motion of the chin, saying: "There's a fellow I envy! To be confident of producing nothing but masterpieces!"

He complimented Mahoudeau on his "Vintaging Girl;" showed himself paternal to all of them, with that large-minded good-nature of his, the free and easy manner of an old master of the romantic school, who had grown quiet and was decorated. Then turning to Claude:

"Well, what did I tell you? Did you see upstairs? You have become the chief of a school."

"Ah! yes," replied Claude. "They are giving it to me nicely! You are the master of us all."

Bongrand made his usual gesture of vague suffering and went off, saying: "Hold your tongue! I am not even my own master."

For a few moments longer the band wandered through the garden. They had gone back to look at the "Vintaging Girl," when Jory noticed that Gagnière no longer had Irma Bécot on his arm. Gagnière was stupefied; where the devil could he have lost her? But when Fagerolles had told him that she had gone off in the crowd with two gentlemen, he recovered his composure, and followed the others, lighter of heart now that he was relieved of this adventure which had bewildered him.

People now only moved about with difficulty. All the seats were taken by storm; groups obstructed the paths, where the promenaders paused in their slow walk, flowing back around the successful bits of bronze and marble. From the crowded buffet there arose a loud buzzing, a clatter of saucers and spoons appended to the throb of life pervading the vast nave. The sparrows had flown up amid the forest of

iron girders, and one could hear their sharp little chirps, the twittering with which they serenaded the setting sun, under the warm panes of the glass roof.

The atmosphere had now become heavy, there was a damp greenhouse-like warmth, the air quite stationary. And rising above this surging of the garden, the din of the first floor galleries, the tramping of feet on the iron-girded flooring still rolled on with the clamor of a tempest beating against a cliff.

Claude, who had a keen perception of this rumbling storm, ended by hearing nothing else; it had been let loose and was howling in his ears. It was the merriment of the crowd whose jeers and laughter blew a hurricane, as it were, in front of his picture. With an impatient gesture he exclaimed:

"Come, what are we messing about here for? I sha'n't take anything at the refreshment bar, it smells of the Institute. Let's go and have a glass of beer outside, eh?"

They all went out, with their legs bending under them, and with tired faces expressive of contempt; once outside, on finding themselves again face to face with healthy Mother Nature in her springtide season, they breathed noisily with an air of delight. It had barely struck four o'clock, the slanting sun swept along the Champs Elysées and everything flared: the serried strings of carriages, the fresh foliage of the trees, the sheaf-like fountains which spouted up and whirled away in a golden dust. With a lounging step they went hesitatingly down the central avenue, and finally stranded in a little café, the Pavillon de la Concorde, to the left, just before reaching the Place. The room was so small that they sat down outside at the edge of the path, despite the chill falling from the foliated vault, already fully grown and gloomy. But beyond the four rows of chestnut trees, beyond the belt of verdant shade, they beheld the sunlit roadway of

the main avenue where they saw Paris passing before them in a nimbus, the carriages with their wheels, radiating like stars, the large yellow omnibuses, looking even more profusely gilded than triumphal chariots, horsemen whose steeds seemed to emit sparks, and foot passengers who were transfigured and became resplendent in the light.

And during nearly three hours, with his beer untasted before him, Claude spoke and discussed, amid growing fever, broken down in body, and his mind pregnant with all the painting he had just seen. It was the usual winding up of their visit to the Salon, more impassioned this year, however, on account of the liberal measure of the Emperor. It was a rising flood of theories, an intoxication of extreme opinions which made their tongues clammy, all the passion for art, with which their youth was aflame.

"Well, and what of it?" cried Claude; "the public laughs. We must educate the public, that's all! In reality it's a victory! Take away two hundred grotesque canvases, and our Salon beats theirs. We have courage and audacity—we are the future! Yes, yes, you'll see later on; we'll kill their Salon. We'll enter it as conquerors, by dint of producing masterpieces! Laugh, laugh, you big, stupid Paris—laugh until you fall on your knees before us!"

And, stopping short, he pointed prophetically to the triumphal avenue, where the luxury and joy of the city were rolling by in the sunlight. His gestures became more sweeping still, and included the Place de la Concorde, perceived obliquely from where they sat under the trees—the Place de la Concorde, with one of its fountains with a plashing sheet of water, a strip of balustade going off in perspective, and two of its statues—Rouen, with gigantic frame, and Lille, protruding her huge bare foot.

"In the open air, it amuses them," he resumed.

"All right, since they are bent on it, the open air, the school of the open air! Eh! it was a thing strictly between us, it didn't exist yesterday beyond the circle of a few painters. And now they throw the word upon the winds, they themselves found the school! Oh! I'm agreeable. Let it be the school of the open air!"

Jory slapped his thighs.

"Didn't I tell you? I felt sure of making them bite with my articles, the idiots that they are! Ah! how we'll bother them now!"

Mahoudeau also was singing victory, constantly dragging in his "Vintaging Girl," the daring points of which he explained to silent Chaîne, the only one who listened to him; while Gagnière, with the sternness of a timid man waxing wroth over a question of pure theory, spoke of guillotining the Institute; while Sandoz, with the inflamed sympathy of the hard worker, and Dubuche, giving way to the contagion of revolutionary friendship, became exasperated, and struck the table, swallowing up Paris with each draught of beer. Fagerolles, very calm, retained his usual smile. He had accompanied them for the sake of amusement, for the singular pleasure which he found in pushing his comrades into farcical affairs that were bound to turn out badly. At the very moment when he was lashing their spirit of revolt, he himself formed the firm resolution to work in future for the Prix de Rome. That day decided him; he thought it idiotic to compromise his talent any further.

The sun was declining on the horizon, there was now only a returning stream of carriages, coming back from the Bois in the pale golden shimmer of sunset. The closing of the Salon must be nearly over; a long string of pedestrians passed by, gentlemen who looked like critics, each with a catalogue under his arm.

Suddenly Gagnière became enthusiastic: "Ah! Couragod, there was one who had his share in inventing

landscape painting. Have you seen his 'Pond of Gagny' at the Luxembourg?"

"A marvel!" exclaimed Claude. "It was painted thirty years ago, and nothing more substantial has been turned out since. Why is it left at the Luxembourg? It ought to be in the Louvre."

"But Couragod isn't dead," said Fagerolles.

"What! Couragod isn't dead! No one ever sees him or speaks of him."

Then there was general stupefaction when Fagerolles assured them that the great landscape painter, now seventy years old, lived somewhere in the neighborhood of Montmartre, in a little house, among his fowls, ducks and dogs. One might outlive one's own glory, then; there were such melancholy instances of old artists disappearing before their death. Silence fell upon them all; they were taken with a shivering when they perceived Bongrand passing by on a friend's arm, with a congestive face and a nervous air as he waved his arm to them; and, almost immediately behind him, surrounded by his disciples, came Chambouvard, laughing very loud, and tapping his heels on the pavement in absolute mastery, confident of immortality.

"What? Are you going?" said Mahoudeau to Chaîne, who was rising from his chair.

The other mumbled some indistinct words in his beard, and went off after distributing hand-shakes among the party.

"He's going to pay a visit to your friend," said Jory to Mahoudeau. "You know, the herbalist woman, with the simples!"

The sculptor shrugged his shoulders amidst the general laughter.

But Claude did not hear. He was now discussing architecture with Dubuche. No doubt, that plan of a museum gallery which he exhibited wasn't bad; only

there was nothing new in it. It was so much patient marquetry of the school formulas. Ought not all the arts to advance in one line of battle? Ought not the evolution that was transforming literature, painting, even music itself, to renovate architecture as well? If ever the architecture of a period was to have a style of its own, it was assuredly the architecture of the period they would soon enter upon, a new period with ground freshly swept, ready for the rebuilding of everything, a field freshly sown, whence a new people would spring. Down with the Greek temples; there was no reason why they should continue to subsist under our sky amid our society! Down with the Gothic cathedrals, since faith in legend was dead! Down with the delicate colonnades, the lace-like work of the Renaissance—that reviviscence of the antique grafted on mediævalism—precious art-jewelry, no doubt, but in which democracy could not dwell! And he demanded, he claimed with violent gestures, the architectural formula suited to democracy; the work in stone that would express its tenets; the building where it would be at home; something vast and strong, great and simple at the same time; the something that was already being indicated in our railway stations, in our markets, with the solid elegance of their iron girders, but purified and raised to a standard of beauty, proclaiming the grandeur of our intellectual conquests.

"Ah! yes, ah! yes," repeated Dubuche, catching Claude's enthusiasm; "that's what I want to accomplish; you'll see some day. Give me time to succeed, and when I'm my own master—ah! when I'm my own master."

Night was coming on apace, and Claude was growing more and more animated in the enervation of his passion, showing a fluency, an eloquence which his comrades had not known him to possess. They all

grew excited in listening to him, ending by becoming noisily gay over the extraordinary witticisms he launched forth. He himself, having returned to the subject of his picture, again discussed it with a deal of gayety, caricaturing the crowd looking at it, and imitating the imbecile scale of laughter. Along the avenue, now of a cindrous tinge, one only saw the shadows of infrequent vehicles dart past. The side-path was quite black; an icy chill fell from the trees. Nothing broke the stillness but the sound of song coming from a clump of verdure behind the café; there was some rehearsal at the Concert de l'Horloge, it was the sentimental voice of a girl trying a love-song.

"Ah! how they amused me, the idiots!" exclaimed Claude, in a last burst. "Do you know, I wouldn't take a hundred thousand francs for my day's pleasure."

Then he relapsed into silence, thoroughly exhausted. No one had any strength left; silence reigned; they all shivered in the icy gust that swept by. And they separated in a sort of bewilderment, shaking hands in a tired fashion. Dubuche was going to dine out; Fagerolles had an appointment; in vain did Jory, Mahoudeau and Gagnière try to drag Claude to Foucart's, a twenty-five sous' restaurant; Sandoz was already taking him away on his arm, feeling anxious at seeing him so gay.

"Come along. I promised my mother to be back for dinner. You'll take a bit with us. It will be nice; we'll finish the day together."

They both went down the quay, past the Tuileries, walking side by side, close to each other in fraternal fashion. But at the Pont des Saints-Pères the painter stopped short.

"What, are you going to leave me?" exclaimed Sandoz. "Why, I thought you were going to dine with me?"

"No, thanks; I've too bad a headache. I'm going home to bed."

And he obstinately abided by this excuse.

"All right, old man," said Sandoz at last, with a smile. "One doesn't see much of you now-a-days. You live in mystery. Go on, old boy, I don't want to be in your way."

Claude restrained a gesture of impatience: and, letting his friend cross the bridge, he continued his way along the quays by himself. He walked along with his arms hanging at his sides, his nose fixed on the ground, seeing nothing, but taking long strides like a somnambulist who is guided by instinct. On the Quai de Bourbon, in front of his door, he looked up, surprised to see a cab waiting there at the edge of the foot pavement, and barring his way. And it was with the same automatical step that he entered the doorkeeper's room to take his key.

"I have given it to that lady," shouted Madame Joseph from the back of the room. "She is up-stairs."

"What lady?" he asked in bewilderment.

"That young person. Come, you know very well, the one that always comes."

He had not the remotest idea whom she meant. Still, in his utter confusion of mind, he decided to go up-stairs. The key was in the door, which he slowly opened and closed again.

For a moment Claude stood stock still. The darkness had invaded the studio; a violet-tinted dimness, a melancholy twilight fell from the large window, enveloping everything. He could no longer plainly distinguish either the floor, or the furniture, or the sketches; everything that was lying about seemed to melt as it were in the stagnant waters of a pool. Showing prominently, however, there was a dark figure seated on the edge of the couch, stiff with

waiting, anxious and despairing amid the last gasp of daylight. It was Christine; he recognized her.

She held out her hands, and murmured in a low, halting voice:

"I have been here for three hours; yes, for three hours, all alone, and listening. I took a cab on leaving there, and I only wanted to stay a minute, and get back as soon as possible. But I should have stayed all night; I could not go away without shaking hands with you."

She continued, and told him of her mad desire to see the picture; her prank of going to the Salon, and how she had tumbled into it amidst the storm of laughter, amidst the jeers of all those people. It was she whom they hissed like that. And seized with wild terror, distracted with grief and shame, she had fled, as if she had felt the laughter fall upon her bare flesh and lash it, as with blows from a whip, until the blood flowed. But she now forgot about herself in her concern for him, upset by the thought of the grief he must feel, womanly sensibility magnifying the bitterness of the repulse, and brimming over with the need of exercising vast charity.

"Oh, friend, don't grieve! I wished to see and tell you that they are jealous of it all, that I found the picture very nice, and that I feel very proud and happy at having helped you, at being, if ever so little, part of it."

Still motionless, he listened to her stammering those tender words in an ardent voice, and suddenly he sank down at her feet, letting his head fall on her knees and bursting into tears. All his excitement of the afternoon, all the bravery he had shown, hissed though he was, all his gayety and violence collapsed there, in a fit of sobs which well nigh choked him. From the gallery where the laughs had buffeted him, he heard them pursuing him like a barking pack through the

Champs Elysées, then along the banks of the Seine, and now in his studio behind his back. His strength was utterly spent; he felt weaker than a child; he repeated, rolling his head from one side to another, in a stifled voice and with vague gestures:

"My God! how I do suffer!"

Then she, with her two hands, raised his face to her lips in a fit of passion. She kissed him.

"Be quiet, be quiet, I love you!" she whispered.

The dusk enveloped them; they remained in each other's arms, overcome, in tears, amid this first transport of love. Near them, in the middle of the table, the lilac she had sent that morning embalmed the night air, and—alone shiny with lingering light—the scattered particles of gold leaf, wafted from the frame, twinkled like a swarming of stars.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUNTRY HOME.

IN the evening, while he was still holding her in his arms, he had said to her:

"Stay."

But with an effort she had disengaged herself.

"I cannot, I must go home."

"Then come to-morrow—I beg of you. Do come to-morrow."

"To-morrow, no, it's impossible. Good-bye. I'll come soon."

And the next morning, already at seven o'clock, she was there, her face still flushed with the falsehood she had told Madame Vanzade: a young friend from Clermont whom she was to meet at the station, and with whom she should spend the day.

Claude, delighted at thus possessing her for a whole day, wanted to take her into the country, very far away under the glorious sunlight, so as to have her entirely to himself. She was delighted; they scampered off like lunatics, and reached the St. Lazare Station just in time to catch the Havre train. He knew beyond Mantes a little village called Bennecourt, where there was an artists' inn which he had at times invaded with some comrades; and without minding the two hours' rail, he took her to breakfast there, just as he would have taken her to Asnières. She made very merry over this journey, to which there seemed no end. So much the better if it were to take them to the end of

the world! It seemed to them as if evening would never come.

At ten o'clock they alighted at Bonnières; they took the ferry—an old ferry-boat creaking and grating against its chain—for Bennecourt is situated on the opposite bank of the Seine. It was a splendid May morning, the rippling wavelets were spangled with gold in the sunlight, the young foliage showed delicately green against the cloudless azure. And, beyond the islets situated at this point of the river, how delightful to find the country inn, with its small grocery business attached, its large common room, smelling of soapsuds, and its vast yard full of manure, on which the ducks disported themselves.

"Hallo, Faucheur! we have come to breakfast! An omelette, some sausages and some cheese."

"Are you going to stay the night, Monsieur Claude?"

"No, no; another time. And some white wine; eh? you know that pinky wine that grates a bit in the throat."

Christine had already followed Mother Faucheur to the barnyard, and when the latter came back with her eggs, she asked Claude with her crafty peasant's laugh:

"And so now you're married?"

"Well," replied the painter straightway, "it looks like it since I'm with my wife."

The breakfast was exquisite; the omelette overdone, the sausages too greasy, and the bread so hard that he had to cut it into fingers for her lest she should hurt her wrist. They emptied two bottles of wine, and began a third, so gay and noisy that they ended by becoming bewildered in the long room where they partook of the meal all alone. She, with her cheeks aflame, declared that she was tipsy; it had never happened to her before, and she thought it very funny.

Oh! so funny, and she burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"Let us get a breath of air," she said at last.

"Yes, let's take a stroll. We must start back at four o'clock; so we have three hours before us."

They went up the village of Bennecourt, the yellow houses of which stretch along the river bank for a couple of kilomètres. All the villagers were in the fields; they only met three cows, led by a little girl. He, with an outstretched arm, told her all about the locality; seemed to know whither he was going, and when they had reached the last house—an old building, standing on the bank of the Seine, just opposite the slopes of Jeufosse—turned round it, and entered a small wood of closely planted oaks.

Two hours later, when they came out of the wood, they started: a peasant stood in the open doorway of the house and seemed to have watched them with his small eyes, like those of an old wolf. Christine turned quite pink, while Claude, to hide his embarrassment, shouted out:

"Hallo! Porrette! Does that shanty belong to you?"

Then the old fellow, with tears in his eyes, related that his tenants had gone away without paying him, leaving their furniture behind. And he invited them in.

"There's no harm in looking; you may know some one who would like to take it. There are many Parisians who'd be glad of it. Three hundred francs a year, with the furniture, it's for nothing, eh?"

They inquisitively followed him inside. It was a rambling old place that seemed to have been cut out of a barn. Down-stairs an immense kitchen and a dining-room, in which one might have given a dance; up-stairs two rooms also, so vast that one seemed lost in them. As for the furniture, it consisted of a walnut bedstead in one of the rooms, and

of a table and some household utensils in the kitchen. But in front of the house the neglected garden, planted with magnificent apricot trees, was overgrown with large rose-bushes in full bloom; while at the back there was a potato field, reaching as far as the oak plantation, and surrounded by a quickset hedge.

"I'd leave the potatoes as they are," said old Porrette.

Claude and Christine had looked at each other with one of those sudden cravings for solitude and forgetfulness common to lovers. Ah! how nice it would be to love one another there in the depths of this nook, so far away from every one else! But they smiled. Was such a thing to be thought of? They had barely time to catch the train that was to take them back to Paris. And the old peasant, who was Madame Faucheur's father, accompanied them along the river's bank, and, as they were stepping into the ferry-boat, shouted out to them, after quite an inward struggle:

"You know, it'll be two hundred and fifty francs—send me some people."

On reaching Paris, Claude accompaind Christine to Madame Vanzade's door. They had grown very sad. They exchanged a long handshake, silent and despairing, not daring to kiss each other.

A life of torment then began. In the course of a fortnight she was only able to call on three occasions; and she arrived panting, having but a few minutes at her disposal, for, as it happened, the old lady was very exacting just then. Claude questioned her, feeling uneasy at seeing her look so pale, out of sorts, her eyes bright with fever. Never had that pious house, that vault, without air or light, where she died of boredom, caused her so much suffering. Her fits of giddiness had come upon her again; the want of exercise made the blood throb in her temples. She

owned to him that she had fainted one evening in her room, as if she had been suddenly strangled by a leaden hand. Still she did not say a word against her mistress; on the contrary, she softened on speaking of her: the poor creature, so old and so infirm and so kind-hearted, who called her her daughter! She felt as if she were committing a wicked act each time she forsook her to hurry to her lover's!

Two more weeks went by. The falsehoods with which she had to buy, as it were, each hour of liberty became intolerable to her. She quivered with shame now when she returned into that home of rectitude, where her love seemed a blotch. She had given herself, she would have proclaimed it aloud, and her feelings revolted at having to hide it like a crime, and having to lie basely, like a servant afraid of being sent away.

At last, one evening in the studio, at the moment when she was going away once more, Christine threw herself with a distracted gesture into Claude's arms, and sobbing with suffering and passion: "Ah! I cannot. I cannot—do keep me with you; prevent me from going back."

He had caught hold of her, and was almost smothering her with kisses.

"You really love me, then! Oh, my darling! But I am so very poor, and you would lose everything. Can I allow you to forego everything like this?"

She sobbed more violently still; her halting words were choked by her tears.

"The money, eh? which she might leave me? Do you think I calculate? I have never thought of it, I swear it to you! Ah! let her keep everything and let me be free. I have no ties, no relatives; can't I be allowed to do as I like?"

Then, in a last sob of agony: "Ah, you are right; it's wrong to desert her, the poor woman! Ah! I

despise myself! I wish I had the strength! But I love you too much! I suffer too much; surely you won't let me die?"

"Stay! stay!" he exclaimed. "Let others die, there are but we two on earth!"

They both wept and laughed, swearing amidst their kisses that they would never, never leave each other again.

It was so much madness. Christine left Madame Vanzade in the most brutal fashion. She took her trunk away the very next morning. She and Claude had at once remembered the deserted old house at Bennecourt, the giant rose-bushes, the immense rooms. Ah! to go away, to go away without loss of an hour, to live at the world's end, in the bliss of their fresh existence. She clapped her pretty hands for joy. He, still bleeding from his defeat at the Salon, and anxious to recover from it, longed for complete rest in the country; over there he would have the real open air, he would work with the grass up to his neck, and bring back some masterpieces. In a couple of days everything was ready, the studio given up, the few household chattels taken to the railway station. They had had a slice of luck, a small fortune of about five hundred francs paid by Papa Malgras for a score of sketches, selected from among the waifs and strays of the removal. They would be able to live like princes. Claude had still his income of a thousand francs a year; Christine had saved some money, besides having her outfit and dresses. And away they went; it was a perfect flight, friends avoided and not even warned by letter, Paris despised and forsaken amid laughter expressive of relief.

June was drawing to a close, the rain fell in torrents during the week they arranged their new home, and they discovered that old Porrette had taken away half the kitchen utensils before signing their agreement.

But the disillusion did not affect them. They took a delight in dabbling about amid the showers; they made journeys three leauges long, as far as Vernon, to buy plates and saucepans, which they brought back with them in triumph. At last they got shipshape, only occupying one of the up-stairs rooms, abandoning the other one to the mice, transforming the dining-room below into a studio; and, above all, happy and pleased like children at having their meals in the kitchen off a deal table, near the hearth where the soup was singing. To wait upon them they had taken a girl from the village, who came in the morning and went home at night, Mélie, a niece of the Faucheurs, whose stupidity delighted them. In fact, you could not have found a greater idiot in the whole department. The sun having reappeared, some delightful days followed, the months melted away amid monotonous felicity. They never knew the date, and they mixed up the days of the week together. After breakfast came endless strolls, long walks over the table-land planted with apple trees, along the grassy country roads; excursions along the banks of the Seine through the meadows as far as La Roche-Guyon; and then came still more distant explorations, perfect journeys on the opposite side of the river, amid the cornfields of Bonnières and Jeufosse. A person obliged to leave the neighborhood had sold them an old boat for thirty francs, so they also had the river at their disposal, and were seized with the passion of savages for it, living on its waters for whole days, rowing about, discovering new countries, and remaining hidden for hours under the willows on the banks, in the little creeks, dark with shade. Betwixt the eyots scattered along the stream there was a whole city, shifting and mysterious, a network of passages along which they softly glided, brushed caressingly by the lower branches of the trees, alone, as it were, in the world, with the

ringdoves and the kingfishers. He at times had to spring out on to the sand, with bare legs, to push the skiff. She bravely plied the oars, bent on going against the strongest currents, exulting in her strength. And in the evening they ate cabbage soup in the kitchen, laughing at Mélie's stupidity, just as they had laughed at it the day before.

Every evening Christine said:

"Now, my dear, you must promise me one thing—that you'll set to work to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow; I give you my word."

"And you know if you don't, I shall really get angry this time. Is it I who prevent you?"

"You! what an idea. Since I came here to work —dash it all! you'll see to-morrow."

On the morrow they started off again in the skiff; she looked at him with an embarrassed smile when she saw that he took neither canvas nor colors. Then she kissed him, laughing, proud of her power, moved by this constant sacrifice he made to her. And then came fresh affectionate remonstrances: "To-morrow, ah! to-morrow she would tie him to his easel!"

However, Claude made some attempts at work. He began a study of the slopes of Jeufosse, with the Seine in the foreground; but Christine followed him to the islet where he had installed himself, and stretched herself on the grass close to him with parted lips, her eyes watching the blue sky. And she looked so lovely lying there amidst the verdure, in this solitude, where nothing broke the silence but the rippling of the water, that every minute he relinquished his palette to nestle by her side. On another occasion, he was altogether charmed by an old farm house, just beyond Bennecourt, shaded by some antiquated apple tree which had grown to the size of oaks. He came there two days in succession, but on the third she took him to the market at Bon-

nières to buy some hens. The next day was also lost; the canvas had dried; he grew impatient in trying to work at it again, and finally abandoned it altogether. During the whole of the warm weather he thus had but a velleity to work—bits of painting, barely roughed out, laid aside on the first pretext, without an effort at perseverance. His passion for work, that fever of former days that made him rise at daybreak to battle with his rebellious art, seemed to have gone; a reaction of indifference and laziness had set in, and he vegetated delightfully as if, after recovering from some severe illness, he were tasting the unique joy of living physically only.

However, the days went by and the solitude didn't prove irksome. No desire for diversion, of paying or receiving visits, had yet made them look beyond themselves. Such hours as she did not spend near him she employed in noisy household cares, turning the house upside down with grand cleanings, which Mélie executed under her supervision, having fits of reckless activity, which made her engage in personal combats with the three saucepans in the kitchen. The garden especially occupied her; provided with pruning shears, her hands lacerated with thorns, she reaped harvests of roses from the giant rose-bushes; she gave herself a backache by insisting on gathering the apricots, which she had sold for two hundred francs to some of the Englishmen who scour the district every year. She was very proud of her bargain, and seriously talked of living upon the garden produce. He cared less for gardening; he had placed his couch in the large dining-room, transformed into a studio; and he stretched himself on it, watching her sow and plant, through the wide-open window. There was profound peace, the certainty that no one would come, that a ring at the bell would not disturb them at any moment of the day. He carried this dread of coming in contact with

people so far as to avoid passing before Faucheur's inn, in his constant fear of running against a party of chums from Paris. Not a soul came throughout the livelong summer. And every night he repeated that, after all, it was deuced lucky.

One secret wound, however, bled in the depths of his happiness. After the flight from Paris, Sandoz, having learnt the address, and having written to ask whether he might come and see Claude, the latter had not answered his letter; coolness had followed, and the old friendship seemed dead. Christine was grieved at this, for she realized well enough that he had broken off for her sake. She constantly reverted to the subject; she did not want to estrange him from his friends, but insisted upon his inviting them. But though he promised to set matters right, he did nothing of the kind. It was all over; what was the use of raking up the past?

However, money having become scarce towards the latter days of July, he was obliged to go to Paris to sell Papa Malgras half a dozen of his old studies, and on accompanying him to the station, Christine made him solemnly promise to go and see Sandoz. In the evening she was there again, at the Bonnières Station, waiting for him.

"Well, did you see him? Did you embrace each other?"

He began walking by her side in silent embarrassment. Then he answered in a husky voice:

"No; I hadn't time."

Thereupon, sorely distressed, with two big tears welling to her eyes, she replied:

"You grieve me very much, indeed."

And as they walked under the trees he kissed her, crying also, and begging of her not to make him sadder still. Could people change life? Did it not suffice that they were happy together?

During the earlier months they only met with some strangers once. It was a little above Bennecourt, going towards La Roche-Guyon. They were strolling along a deserted, wooded path, one of those delightful, hollow ways or cuttings, when, at a turning, they came upon three people of the middle-class out for a walk—father, mother and daughter. It precisely happened that, believing themselves to be quite alone, Claude and Christine had put their arms round each other's waists, like lovers, forgetting their reserve; she, bending towards him, yielded her lips; while he, laughingly, protruded his; and their surprise was so sudden that they did not change their attitude, but, still clasped together, advanced at the same slow pace. The amazed family remained transfixed against one of the banks, the father, stout and apoplectic, the mother as thin as a knife, the daughter, a mere shadow, looking like a sick bird moulting—all three of them ugly, and but scantily provided with the vitiated blood of their race. They looked a disgrace amidst the throbbing life of nature, beneath the glorious sun. And all at once the sorry child, who, with stupefied eyes was watching love pass by, was pushed by her father, dragged along by her mother, both beside themselves, exasperated by this unrestrained kiss, and asking whether there was no longer a police in the country, while, still without hurrying, the two lovers went off triumphantly in their glory.

Claude, however, was questioning himself, his memory hesitating. Where the devil had he beheld those heads, that middle-class degeneracy, those flattened, crabbed faces reeking with millions earned at the expense of the poor? It was assuredly in some important circumstance of his life. And all at once he remembered; he recognized the Margaillans, that building contractor whom Dubuche had promenaded about the Salon of the Rejected, and who had laughed

in front of his picture with the roaring laughter of a fool. A couple of hundred steps further on, as he and Christine emerged from the cutting and found themselves in front of a vast estate, with a large white building girt round with fine trees, they learnt from an old peasant woman that La Richaudière, as it was called, had belonged to the Margaillans for three years past. They had paid fifteen hundred thousand francs for it, and had just spent more than a million in improvements.

"This part of the country won't see much of us," said Claude, as they returned to Bennecourt. "These monsters spoil the landscape."

The winter was a terribly inclement one, and a severe cold kept Christine in the draughty house which they did not succeed in warming. She suffered from very frequent indispositions; she remained crouching over the fire, and was obliged to get angry for Claude to go out by himself and take long walks on the frost-bound, clanking roads. And he, finding himself alone during these walks, after months of constant companionship, wondered at the way his life had turned, against his own will, as it were. He had never wished for such home life even with her; he would, had he been consulted, have expressed his horror of it; it had come about, however, and could not be undone. This fate had evidently been in store for him; he had been destined to content himself with the first woman who did not feel ashamed of him. The hard ground resounded beneath his wooden-soled shoes, the icy blast froze the current of his reverie, which lingered on vague thoughts, on his luck of having, at any rate, met with an honest girl. And his love came back to him; he hurried home to take Christine in his trembling arms as if he had been in danger of losing her, merely disconcerted when she disengaged herself with a cry of pain.

Christine became the mother of a boy about the middle of February.

From that moment the little fellow revolutionized the house, for she, who had shown herself such an active housewife, proved to be a very awkward nurse. She failed to become motherly, despite her kind heart and her distress at the slightest pimple. She grew weary, gave in at once, and called for Mélie, who only made matters worse by her gaping stupidity. The father had to come to the rescue, still more awkward than the two women. The discomfort which needlework had caused her of old, her want of aptitude as regards the usual occupations of her sex, revived in the cares the baby required. The child was ill-kept, and grew up anyhow in the garden, in the large rooms left untidy in sheer despair, littered with swaddling clothes and broken toys, the uncleanliness and destruction of a young gentleman cutting his teeth.

It was at this period, however, that Claude resumed work a bit. The winter was drawing to a close, he did not know how to spend the bright, sunny mornings, since Christine could no longer go out before mid-day on account of Jacques, whom they had named thus after his maternal grandfather, though they neglected to have him christened. Claude worked in the garden, at first, in a random way: made a rough sketch of the line of apricot trees, roughed out the giant rose-bushes, composed some bits of still life, four apples, a bottle, and a stoneware jar, disposed on a table-napkin. It was only to pass his time. Then he warmed to the work; the idea of painting a figure in the full sunlight ended by haunting him; and from that moment his wife became his victim, she herself agreeably enough, offering herself, feeling happy to afford him pleasure, without as yet understanding what a terrible rival she was giving herself. He painted her a score of times, dressed in white, in red, amidst

the verdue, standing, walking, or reclining on the grass, with a wide-brimmed straw hat, or bareheaded, under a parasol, the cherry-tinted silk of which bathed her features in a pinky light. He never felt wholly satisfied; he scratched out the canvases after two or three sittings, and at once began afresh, obstinately sticking to the same subject. A few studies, incomplete, but charmingly indicated in a vigorous style, were saved from the palette-knife, and hung against the walls of the dining-room.

And after Christine it became Jacques' turn to pose. They stripped him to the skin, like a little St. John the Baptist, and on the warm days, stretched him on a blanket, where he was told not to stir. But devil a bit could they make him keep still. Getting gay and frisky, in the sunlight, he crowed and kicked with his tiny pink feet in the air, rolling about and turning somersaults. The father, after laughing, grew angry, and swore at the tiresome mite, who would not keep quiet for a minute. Who ever heard of trifling with painting? Then the mother made big eyes at the little one, and held him while the painter quickly sketched an arm or a leg. Claude obstinately kept at it for weeks, tempted as he felt by the pretty tones of that childish flesh. It was not the father, but the artist, that gloated over the boy as the subject for a masterpiece, blinking his eyes, and dreaming of the picture he wanted to paint. And he renewed the experiment again and again, watching the lad for days, and feeling furious that the little scamp would not go to sleep just at a time of day when he, Claude, might have painted him.

One day, when Jacques was sobbing, refusing to keep still, Christine gently said:

"My dear, you tire the poor pet."

Then Claude burst forth, full of remorse:

"After all, you are right; I'm a fool with this

painting of mine. Children are not intended for that sort of thing."

The spring and summer went by still in great peace. They went out less often; they had almost given up the boat, which finished rotting against the bank, for it was quite a job to take the little one with them among the islets. But they often strolled along the banks of the Seine, without, however, going farther afield than a kilomètre. He, tired of the everlasting views in the garden, now attempted some sketches by the riverside, and on such days she went to fetch him with the child, sitting down to watch him paint, pending the time when they all three returned home with flagging steps, beneath the ashen-gray dusk of waning daylight. One afternoon he was surprised at seeing her bring the old album she had used as a young girl with her. She joked about it, and explained that to sit behind him like that had roused a wish to work herself. Her voice was a little unsteady; the truth was that she felt a longing to share his labor, since this labor took him away from her more and more each day. She drew and ventured to wash in two or three water colors after the careful method of a school-girl. Then, discouraged by his smiles, feeling that no community of ideas would be arrived at on that ground, she once more put her album aside, making him promise to give her some lessons in painting when he had time.

Besides, she thought his latter pictures very pretty. After this year of rest in the open country, in the full sunlight, he painted with a fresh and clearer vision, as it were, with a harmonious and brighter coloring. He had never before been able to treat reflections so skilfully, or possessed a more correct perception of men and things bathing in diffused light. And henceforth, won over by this feast of colors, she would have declared it all capital if he would have con-

descended to finish his work a little more, and if she had not remained nonplused now and then before a mauve ground or a blue tree, which upset all her preconceived notions of coloration. One day when she ventured upon a bit of criticism, precisely about an azure-tinted poplar, he made her go to nature and note for herself the delicate bluishness of the foliage. It was true enough, the tree was blue; but in her inmost heart she did not surrender, and condemned reality; there could not be any blue trees in nature.

She no longer spoke but gravely of the studies hanging in the dining-room. Art was returning into their lives, and it made her muse. When she saw him go off with his bag, his portable easel and his sunshade, it often happened that she flung herself round his neck, asking:

"You love me, say?"

"How silly you are. Why shouldn't I love you?"

"Then kiss me, as you love me, kiss me a great deal, a great deal."

Then accompanying him as far as the road, she added:

"And mind your work; you know that I have never prevented you from working. Go, go; I am very much pleased when you work."

Anxiety seemed to seize hold of Claude, when the autumn of the second year tinged the leaves yellow, and ushered in the cold weather. The season just happened to be abominable; a fortnight of pouring rain kept him idle at home; and then the fog came at each moment, hindering his work. He sat in front of the fire, out of sorts; he never spoke of Paris, but the city rose up over there, on the horizon, the winter city, with its gas lamps flaring already at five o'clock, its gatherings of friends, spurring each other on to emulation, its life of ardent production, which even the frosts of December could not slacken. He

went there thrice in one month, on the pretext of seeing Malgras, to whom he had, again, sold a few small pictures. He no longer avoided passing in front of Faucheur's inn; he even allowed himself to be waylaid by old Porrette, and accepted a glass of white wine, and his glance scoured the room as if, despite the season, he had been looking for some comrades of yore, who had arrived there, perchance, that morning. He lingered, as if awaiting them: then, in despair at his solitude, he returned home, stifling with all that fermented within him, ill at having no one to whom he might shout out everything that made his brain almost burst.

However, the winter went by, and Claude had the consolation of being able to paint some lovely snow scenes. A third year was beginning, when towards the close of May, an unexpected meeting filled him with emotion. He had that morning clambered up the plateau to find a subject, having at last grown tired of the banks of the Seine; and, at the bend of a road, he stood amazed at seeing Dubuche, in a silk hat and carefully-buttoned frock coat, coming towards him between the double row of elder hedges.

"What! is it you!"

The architect stammered from sheer vexation:

"Yes, I am going to pay a visit. It's confoundedly idiotic in the country, eh? But it can't be helped. There are certain things one's obliged to do. And you live near here? I knew—that is to say, I didn't. I had been told something about it, but I thought it was on the opposite side, farther down."

Claude, very much moved at seeing him, helped him out of his difficulty.

"All right, all right, old man, there is no need to apologize. I am the most guilty party. Ah! it's a long while since we saw each other! If you knew the

bump my heart gave when I saw your nose appear from behind the leaves!"

Then he took his arm and accompanied him, giggling with pleasure, while the other, in his constant preoccupation of his future, which always made him talk about himself, at once began speaking of his prospects. He had just become a first-class pupil at the School, after having, with an infinite deal of trouble, carried off the regulation "honorable mentions." But his success left him as perplexed as ever. His parents no longer sent him a penny, and wailed about their poverty so that he might support them in his turn. He had given up the idea of competing for the Prix de Rome, feeling certain of being beaten, and anxious to earn his living. And he was weary already; sick at scouring the town, at earning one franc twenty-five centimes an hour with ignorant architects, who treated him like a hodman. What course should he adopt? How was he to guess at the shortest route? He might leave the School; he would get a lift from his master, the influential Dequersonnière, who liked him for his docility and application. Only what a deal of trouble and uncertainty there would still be before him! And he complained bitterly of the Government schools, where one slaved for years, and which did not even provide a position for all those they cast upon the pavement.

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of the path. The elder hedges were leading to an open plain, and La Richaudière appeared amid its lofty trees.

"Hold hard! of course," exclaimed Claude, "I hadn't thought about it—you're going to that shanty. Oh, the baboons; there's a lot of ugly mugs, if you like."

Dubuche, looking vexed at this artist's cry, protested with an air of stiffness: "All the same, that Papa Margaillan, idiot as he seems to you, is a first-

rate man in his own business. You should see him in his building-yards, among the houses he runs up, as active as the very fiend, with a marvellous perception of good management, a wonderful scent as to the right streets to build and what materials to buy. Besides, one does not earn millions without becoming a gentleman. And, for what I want of him, I should be very silly not to be polite to a man who can be useful to me."

While talking, he barred the narrow path, preventing his friend's advance—no doubt from a fear of being compromised by being seen in his company, and in order to make him understand that they ought to separate there.

Claude was on the point of inquiring about the comrades in Paris, but he kept silent. Not even a word was said about Christine, and he was reluctantly deciding to leave Dubuche, and was already holding out his hand, when, in spite of himself, this question fell upon his quivering lips:

"And is Sandoz all right?"

"Yes, he is pretty well. I seldom see him. He spoke to me about you last month. He is still grieved at your having shown us the door."

"But I didn't show you the door," exclaimed Claude, beside himself. "Come and see me, I beg of you. I shall be so glad."

"All right, then, we'll come. I'll tell him to come, I give you my word. Good-bye, old man, good-bye, I am in a hurry."

And Dubuche went off towards La Richaudière, whilst Claude watched his figure dwindle as he crossed the cultivated plain, until nothing remained but the shiny silk of his hat and the black spot of his coat. He returned home slowly, his heart bursting with a nameless sadness. He said nothing to Christine about this meeting.

A week later she had gone to Faucheur's to buy a pound of vermicelli, and lingered on her way back, gossiping with a neighbor with a child in her arms, when a gentleman who alighted from the ferry-boat approached and asked her:

"Monsieur Claude Lantier? He lives near here, does he not?"

She was taken aback, and simply answered:

"Yes, sir, if you'll kindly follow me—"

They walked on side by side for about a hundred yards. The stranger, who seemed to know her, had glanced at her with a good-natured smile; but as she hurried on, trying to hide her embarrassment by looking very grave, he remained silent. She opened the door and showed him into the studio, saying:

"Claude, here is some one for you."

There was a loud cry; the two men were already in each other's arms.

"Oh, my good old Pierre! how kind of you to come! And Dubuche?"

"He was prevented at the last moment by some business, and he sent me a telegram to go without him."

"All right, I half expected it; but you are here. By the thunder of heaven, I am glad!" And turning towards Christine, who was smiling, sharing their joy: "It's true, I didn't tell you. But the other day I met Dubuche, who was going up there, to those monsters' estate—"

But he stopped short again, and then shouted out with a mad gesture:

"I'm losing my wits, upon my word. You have never spoken to each other, and I leave you there like that. My dear, you see this gentleman. He's my old chum, Pierre! Sandoz, whom I love like a brother. And you, my boy; let me introduce my wife. And you are going to give each other a kiss."

Christine began to laugh outright, and tendered her cheek heartily. Sandoz had pleased her at once with his good-natured air, his sound friendship, the fatherly sympathy with which he looked at her. Tears of emotion came to her eyes as he kept both her hands in his, saying:

"You are very good to love Claude, and you must love each other always, for it is, after all, the best thing in life."

Then, bending to kiss the little one, whom she had on her arm, he added: "So there's one already?"

The painter made a vague apologetical gesture: "What would you have? That sort of thing comes without your thinking of it."

Claude retained Sandoz in the studio, while Christine turned the house upside down preparing breakfast. In a few words he told him the whole of the story, who she was, how they had known each other, and what had led to their starting housekeeping together.

Sandoz then began to marvel at the studies hanging on the walls. Ha, the scamp had turned his time to good account! What accuracy of coloring! What a dash of real sunlight! And Claude, who was listening to him, delighted, and laughing proudly, was just going to question him about the comrades in Paris, about what they were all of them doing, when Christine re-appeared, shouting:

"Make haste, the eggs are on the table."

They breakfasted in the kitchen, an extraordinary breakfast, a dish of fried gudgeons after the boiled eggs; then the beef from the soup of the night before, arranged in salad fashion, with potatoes and red herrings. It was delicious, the pungent and appetizing smell of the herrings which Mélie had upset on the live coals, the song of the coffee, as it passed, drop by drop, into the pot standing on the kitchen range. And

when the dessert appeared, some strawberries just gathered, a cream cheese from a neighboring dairy, they gossiped and gossiped, their elbows squarely set on the table. In Paris? Well, to tell the truth, the comrades were doing nothing very original in Paris. And yet they were fighting their way, jostling each other in order to get first to the front. Of course, the absent ones missed their chance; it was as well to be there if one did not want to be altogether forgotten. But was talent not talent? Wasn't a man always certain to get on with strength and will? Ah! yes, it was a splendid dream to live in the country, to accumulate masterpieces, then, one day to crush Paris by simply opening one's trunks.

In the evening, when Claude accompanied Sandoz to the station, the latter said to him:

"That reminds me I wanted to tell you something. I think I am going to get married."

The painter burst out laughing.

While waiting for the train to come up, they went on chatting. Sandoz explained his ideas on marriage, which, in middle-class fashion, he considered the indispensable condition of good work, substantial, orderly labor, for great modern producers. The destructive woman—the woman that kills the artist, pounds his heart, and feeds upon his brain—was a romantic idea which facts protested against. Besides, as for himself, he needed an affection that would prove the guardian of his tranquillity, a loving home, where he could shut himself up, so as to devote the whole of his life to the huge work, the dream of which he carried about with him, as it were. And he added that everything depended upon one's choice—that he believed he had found what he had been looking for, an orphan, the daughter of petty tradespeople, without a penny, but handsome and intelligent. For the last six months, after resigning his clerkship, he had embraced journal-

ism, by which he gained a larger income. He had just moved his mother to a small house at Batignolles, where the three would live together, two women to love him, and he strong enough to provide for the household.

"Get married, old man," said Claude. "One should act upon one's feelings. And good-bye, for here's your train. Don't forget your promise to come and see us again."

Sandoz returned very often. He dropped in at odd times whenever his newspaper work allowed him, being still free, for he was not to be married till the autumn. These were happy days, whole afternoons of mutual confidences, their old determination to secure fame revived in common.

One day, while alone with Claude on an island, with his eyes fixed in the sky, Sandoz told him of his vast ambition, confessed himself aloud.

"Journalism, let me tell you, is only a battle-ground. One must live, and one has to fight to do so. Then again, the press, despite the unpleasant phases of the profession, is a tremendous power after all, a resistless weapon in the hands of a fellow with convictions. But if I am obliged to avail myself of the profession, I don't mean to grow gray in it! Oh, dear, no! And, besides, I've found what I wanted, a machine that'll crush one with work, something I'm going to plunge into, perhaps never to come out of it."

Silence reigned amid the foliage, motionless in the dense heat. He resumed speaking more slowly and in disconnected phrases:

"So I have found what I wanted for myself. Oh, it isn't much, a little corner only, but sufficient for the span of human life, even when one's ambition is over vast. I am going to take a family, and I shall study its members, one by one, whence they come, whither they go, how they react one upon another.

In short, humanity in a small compass, the way in which humanity grows and behaves. On the other hand, I shall set my men and women in a determined period, which will provide me with the necessary surroundings and circumstances, a slice of history. You understand, eh? A series of books, fifteen, twenty books, episodes that will cling together although having each a separate framework, a suite of novels with which I shall be able to build myself a house for my old days, if they don't crush me!"

Claude, who had disappeared amid the grass, had not stirred. After a fresh spell of silence he summed up:

"That's it, old boy! Run them through, all of them. Only you'll get trounced."

"Oh," said Sandoz, rising up and stretching himself, "my bones are too hard. They'll smash their own wrists. Let's go back; I don't want to miss the train."

Christine had taken a great liking to him, seeing him so robust and upright in all his doings, and she plucked up courage at last to ask a favor of him, that of standing godfather to Jacques. True, she never set foot in church now, but why shouldn't the lad be treated according to custom? What decided her above all was the idea of giving him as a protector this godfather whom she found so serious, so reasonable even in the exuberance of his strength. Claude, expressing surprise, gave his consent with a shrug of the shoulders. And the christening took place; they found a godmother, the daughter of a neighbor, and they made a feast of it, they ate a lobster, brought from Paris.

That very day, as they were saying good-bye, Christine took Sandoz aside and said, in an imploring voice:

"Do come again soon, won't you? He is bored."

In fact, Claude had fits of profound melancholy. He abandoned his work, went out alone, and prowled in spite of himself round about Faucheur's inn, at the spot where the ferry-boat landed its passengers, as if ever expecting to see all Paris come ashore. He had Paris on the brain; he went there every month and returned desolate, unable to work. Autumn came, then winter, a wet winter, sodden with mud; and he spent it in a morose torpidity, bitter even against Sandoz, who, married since October, could no longer come to Bennecourt so often. He only seemed to wake up at each of these visits; deriving a week's excitement from them, and never ceasing to comment feverishly about the news brought from yonder. He, who formerly had hidden his regret of Paris, now-a-days bewildered Christine, chatting to her from morn till night about things she was quite ignorant of, and people she had never seen. When Jacques was asleep, there were endless comments as they sat by the fireside. He grew inflamed, and she had to give her opinion and to pronounce judgment on these stories.

Was not Gagnière an idiot for stultifying his brain with music, he who might have developed so conscientious a talent as a landscape painter? It was said that he was now taking lessons on the piano from a young lady—at his age! What did she, Christine, think of it? Wasn't it a downright hobby? And Jory, who was trying to make up again with Irma Bécot since she had that little house of her own in the Rue de Moscou! She knew them, those two. But the most cunning of the whole lot was Fagerolles, to whom he'd tell a few plain truths, and no mistake, when he met him. What! the turn-coat had competed for the Prix de Rome, which he had managed to miss, however! A fellow who did nothing but jeer at the School, and talked about knocking everything down. Ah, there was no doubt but what the

itching to succeed, the wish to pass over comrades and be hailed by idiots, impelled people to very dirty tricks. Surely she did not mean to stick up for him, eh? She was not sufficiently a Philistine to defend him? And when she had agreed with everything Claude said, he always came back with nervous laughter to the same story, which he thought exceedingly comical; the story of Mahoudeau and Chaîne, who, between them, had killed little Jabouille, the husband of Mathilde, that dreadful herbalist woman. Yes, killed him one evening when the poor consumptive fellow had had a fainting fit, and when, being called in by the woman, they had taken to rubbing him so hard that he had remained dead under their hands.

And if Christine failed to look amused, Claude rose up and said in a churlish voice: "Oh, you; nothing will make you laugh!"

He still adored her and embraced her with the despairing rage of a lover who appeals to passion for that unique joy, forgetfulness of everything. And yet she no longer sufficed. The fact was that another torment had invincibly seized hold of him.

In the spring, Claude, who had sworn not to exhibit again from an affectation of disdain, began to concern himself a great deal about the Salon. When he saw Sandoz he questioned him about what the comrades were going to send. On the opening day he went there and came back the same evening all of a tremor, very severe. There was only a bust by Mahoudeau, well enough, but of no importance; a small landscape of Gagnière's, admitted among the lot, was also of a pretty sunny tone; then there was nothing else, nothing but Fagerolles' picture—an actress in front of her looking-glass, painting her face. He had not mentioned it at first; but he now spoke of it with indignant laughter. What a trickster that Fagerolles was! Now that he had missed his prize he was no longer

afraid to exhibit; he decidedly threw the School overboard; but you should have seen with what skill he managed it, what compromises, a style of painting which aped the audacity of truth without possessing one original merit. And it would be sure to meet with success, the middle-classes were only too fond of being titillated while the artist pretended to hustle them. Ah! it was time, indeed, for a true artist to appear in that mournful desert of a Salon, amid all the knaves and the fools. And, by heavens! what a place might be taken there!

Christine, who listened while he grew angry, ended by faltering:

"If you liked, we might go back to Paris."

"Who was talking about that?" he shouted. "One can't say a word to you without your jumping to false conclusions."

Six weeks afterwards he heard some news that occupied him for a week. His friend Dubuche was going to marry Mademoiselle Régine Margaillan, the daughter of the owner of La Richaudière. It was a complicated story, the details of which surprised and amused him exceedingly. First of all, that cur of a Dubuche had managed to hook a medal for a plan of a villa in a park, which he had exhibited; that of itself was already sufficiently amusing, as the drawing, so it was said, had had to be set on its legs by his master, Dequersonnière, who had quietly obtained this medal for him, from the jury, over which he presided. Then the best of it was that this long awaited award had decided the marriage. Ah! it would be nice trafficking if medals were now awarded to settle needy pupils in rich families! Old Margaillan, like all parvenus, had set his heart upon a son-in-law who could help him, by bringing authentic diplomas and fashionable clothes into the business; and for some time past he had had his eyes on this young man, this

pupil of the School of Arts, whose notes were excellent, who was so persevering, and so highly recommended by his masters. The medal aroused his enthusiasm; he at once gave his daughter and took this partner, who would increase his millions lying idle tenfold, as he knew all that it was needful to know in order to build properly. Besides, by this arrangement poor Régine, always low-spirited and ailing, would at least have a husband in perfect health.

"Well, a man must be fond of money to marry that wretched flayed kitten," said Claude.

And as Christine pityingly took the girl's part, he added: "But I am not down upon her."

Then, having become calmer, he professed to understand, he approved of the marriages of his two old chums. It was true enough, all three had taken wives unto themselves. How funny life was!

Once more the summer drew to an end; it was the fourth they had spent at Bennecourt. They were never to be happier than now; life was peaceful and cheap in the depths of this village. Since they had been there they hadn't lacked money. His thousand francs a year and the proceeds of the few pictures he had sold had sufficed for their wants; they had even put something by and had bought some house linen. On the other hand, little Jacques, two years and a half old by now, got on admirably in the country. From morning till night he rolled about the garden in rags and dirt-begrimed, growing as he listed in robust, ruddy health. His mother often did not know where to take hold of him to wash him a bit. And when she saw him eat and sleep well she did not trouble much; she reserved her anxious affection for her big child of an artist, her dear old man, whose black despondency filled her with anguish. The situation grew worse each day, and although they lived on peacefully without any cause for grief, they, nevertheless,

drifted to melancholy, to a discomfort evinced by constant irritation.

It was all over with their first delights of country life. Their rotten boat, staved in, had gone to the bottom of the Seine. Besides, they did not even think of availing themselves of the skiff the Faucheurs had placed at their disposal. The river bored them; they had grown too lazy to row. They repeated their exclamations of former times respecting certain delightful nooks in the islets without ever being tempted to return and gaze upon them. Even the walks by the riverside had lost their charm; you were broiled there in summer, and caught cold there in winter. And as for the plateau, the vast stretch of land planted with apple trees that overlooked the village, it became like a distant country, something too far off for one to be silly enough to risk one's legs thither. Their house also annoyed them—this barrack where they had to take their meals amid the greasy refuse of the kitchen, where their room served as a meeting-place for the winds from the four points of the compass. As a finishing stroke of bad luck, the apricots had failed that year, and the finest of the giant rose-bushes, which were very old, had been smitten with some canker and died. How sorely time and habit had worn and torn everything! How eternal nature herself seemed to age in this satiated weariness of the same views. But the worst was that, within himself, the painter was getting disgusted with the country, no longer finding a single subject to arouse his enthusiasm, scouring the fields with a mournful tramp, as if they had formed a domain henceforth void, of which he had exhausted the life without leaving as much as a tree overlooked, an effect of light unforeseen, to interest him. No, it was over, frozen, he should never again be able to do anything worth his while in this confounded country!

October came with its rain laden sky. On one of

the first wet evenings Claude flew into a passion because dinner was not ready. He turned that goose of a Mélie out of the house and he clouted Jacques, who got between his legs. Whereupon, Christine, crying, kissed him and said:

"Let's go, oh, let us go back to Paris."

He disengaged himself, and cried in an angry voice:

"What, again! Never; do you hear me?"

"Do it for my sake," she said, warmly. "It's I who ask it of you, it's me that you'll please."

"Why, are you tired of being here then?"

"Yes, I shall die if we stay here much longer, and besides, I want you to work. I feel well enough that your place is over there. It would be a crime for you to bury yourself here any longer."

"No, leave me!"

He was quivering. On the horizon Paris was calling him, the winter Paris being lighted up once more. He could hear from where he stood, as it were, the great efforts of his comrades, he returned there so that they should not triumph without him, to become their chief again, since not one of them had the strength or the pride to be such. And amid this hallucination, amid the desire he felt to hasten there, he persisted in refusing to return from a spirit of involuntary contradiction, which rose up from his very entrails, without his being able to account for it. Was it the fear with which the flesh of the bravest quivers, the mute struggle of happiness against the fatality of destiny?

"Listen," said Christine, excitedly. "I shall pack our boxes, and take you away."

Five days later they started for Paris, after having packed up everything and sent it to the railway.

Claude was already on the road with little Jacques, when Christine fancied that she had forgotten something. She returned alone to the house; she found it

completely empty, and burst out crying. It seemed as if something were being torn from her, as if she were leaving something of herself behind, what, she could not say. How willingly she would have stayed! how ardent was her wish to live there always—she who had just insisted on this departure, this return to the city of passion where she scented a rival. However, she continued searching for what she lacked, and ended by plucking a rose, in front of the kitchen, a last rose, turned brown by the cold. And then she closed the door upon the deserted garden.

CHAPTER VII.

SCOURING PARIS AGAIN.

WHEN Claude found himself once more on the pavement of Paris, he was taken with a feverish longing for noise and motion, with a desire to gad about, scour the city, and go to see his chums. He was off the moment he awoke, leaving Christine to get things ship-shape by herself in the studio they had taken in the Rue de Douai, near the Boulevard de Clichy. In this way, on the second morning of his arrival, he dropped in at Mahoudeau's at eight o'clock, in the chill gray November dawn which had barely broken.

However, the shop in the Rue du Cherche-Midi which the sculptor still occupied, was open, and Mahoudeau himself, half asleep, with a white face, was shivering as he took down the shutters.

"Ah! it's you? The devil! you were early in the country. So it's settled—you are back for good?"

"Yes; since the day before yesterday."

"That's all right. Then we shall see something of each other. Come in; it's sharp this morning."

But Claude felt colder in the shop than outside. He kept the collar of his coat turned up, and plunged his hands deep into his pockets; seized with shivering before the dripping moisture of the bare walls, the muddy heaps of clay, and the constant pools of water soddening the soil. The blast of poverty had swept into the place, emptying the shelves of the casts from the antique, smashing stands and buckets,

held together with bits of rope. It was an abode of dirt and disorder, a mason's cellar going to wreck. And on the window of the door, besmeared with whitewash, there was, in derision as it were, a large beaming sun, roughly drawn with thumbstrokes, and ornamented in the centre with a face, the mouth of which, describing a semi-circle, was bursting with laughter.

"Just wait," said Mahoudeau, "a fire's being lighted. These confounded workshops get chilly directly with the water from the covering cloths."

At that moment, Claude, on turning round, noticed Chaîne on his knees near the stove, pulling the straw from the seat of an old stool to light the coals with. He bade him good-morning but only elicited a muttered growl, without succeeding in making him look up.

"And what are you doing just now, old man?" he asked of the sculptor.

"Oh! nothing of much account. It's been a bad year—worse than the last one, which wasn't worth a rap. There's a crisis in the church statue business. Yes, a bad market for holy wares, and dash it, I've had to tighten my belt! There, in the meanwhile, I'm reduced to this."

He took the linen wraps off a bust, and displayed a long face, still further elongated by whiskers, a face replete with conceit and infinite imbecility.

"It's an advocate who lives near by. Doesn't he look repugnant, eh? And the way he worries me about being very careful with his mouth. However, a fellow must eat, mustn't he?"

He certainly had an idea for the Salon; an upright figure, a girl about to bathe, dipping her foot in the water, and shivering at its freshness with that slight shiver that renders woman so adorable. He showed a little model of it, already cracking, to Claude, who

looked at it in silence, surprised and displeased at the concessions he noticed in it: a sprouting of prettiness beneath persistent exaggeration of form, a natural desire to please, without giving up the determined tendency to the colossal. But Mahoudeau began lamenting; an upright figure was no end of a job. He wanted iron braces that cost money, a modelling frame, which he had not, quite a lot of apparatus. So he would, no doubt, decide to model her lying down by the side of the water.

"Well, what do you say—what do you think of it?" he asked.

"Not bad," answered the painter at last. "A little bit sentimental, though; but it'll all depend upon the execution. And put her upright, old man, upright, else the whole will go to smithereens."

The stove was roaring, and Chaîne, still mute, rose up. He prowled about for a minute, entered the dark back shop, where was the bed he shared with Mahoudeau, and then reappeared, his hat on his head, but more silent still, as it were, with an obstinate, oppressive silence. With his awkward peasant fingers he leisurely took a stick of charcoal and wrote on the wall: "I am going to buy some tobacco; put some more coals in the stove." And then he went out.

Claude, amazed, had watched him writing. He turned to the other.

"What's up?"

"We no longer speak to each other; we write," said the sculptor, quietly.

"Since when?"

"For the last three months."

"And you sleep together?"

"Yes."

Claude burst out laughing. Ah! dash it all! they must have hard heads. And what was the reason of this falling out? Mahoudeau, vexed, flew into a rage

with that brute of a Chaîne. Hadn't he, one night, on coming home unexpectedly, caught Chaîne with Mathilde the herbalist woman from next door, gobbling a pot of jam? No, he would never forgive him for treating himself in that dirty fashion to delicacies on the sly while he, Mahoudeau, was eating his bread dry!

And the grudge had now lasted for nearly three months without a break, without an explanation. They had arranged their lives accordingly; they had reduced their strictly necessary intercourse to short phrases charcoaled on the walls. After all, there was no need for so much talk in one's existence, folks managed to understand each other all the same.

Meanwhile Mahoudeau, who was finishing his task of filling the stove, continued to relieve his mind.

"Well, you may believe me if you like, but when a fellow's almost starving it isn't disagreeable never to speak a word. Yes, one grows brutish amidst the silence; it's like an inside coating that stills the gnawing of the stomach a bit. Ah, that Chaîne! You haven't a notion of his peasant nature. When he had spent his last copper without earning the fortune he expected by painting, he went into trade, a petty trade, which was to enable him to finish his studies. Isn't the fellow a sharp 'un, eh? And just listen to his plan. He had olive oil sent to him from Saint-Firmin, his village, and then he tramped the streets and found a market for the oil among well-to-do families from Provençe living in Paris. Unfortunately, it did not last. He is such a clodhopper that they showed him the door everywhere. And as there was a jar of oil left which no one would buy, well, old man, we live upon it. Yes, on the days we have got some bread we dip our bread into it."

And he pointed to the jar standing in a corner of the shop. Some of the oil having been spilt, the wall and the floor were black with large, greasy stains.

Claude left off laughing. Ah! that poverty, what a discouragement! How could he show himself hard on those whom it crushed! He walked about the studio, no longer vexed at the models weakened in effect by concessions to middle-class taste, and even tolerant with regard to the hideous bust. And he thus came across a copy Chaîne had made at the Louvre, a Mantegna, rendered with dryness, marvellously exact.

"Oh, the brute," he muttered, "it's almost the original; he's never done anything better than that. Perhaps his only fault is that he was born four centuries too late."

Then as the heat became too great he took off his coat, adding:

"He's a long while fetching his tobacco."

"Oh! his tobacco! I know what that means," said Mahoudeau, who had set to work at his bust, finishing the whiskers; "it's at the other side of the wall, his tobacco is. When he sees me occupied he walks off in search of Mathilde. What an idiot he is!"

He, indeed, spoke of Mathilde without the least show of anger, simply saying that it must be a disease with her. Since little Jabouille's death, she had become devout again, which did not prevent her, however, from scandalizing the neighborhood. Although a few pious ladies continued to buy various articles of her, the herbalist's business was going to wreck, and bankruptcy seemed impending. One night, the gas company having cut off the gas in default of payment, she had come to borrow some of their olive oil, which, after all, would not burn in the lamps. She no longer paid anybody; she had even managed to save the cost of a workman, by confiding to Chaîne the repairs. In short, it was quite a disaster; the mysterious shop, with its fleeting shadows of priests' gowns, its discreet confessional-like whispers, its chilled sacristy incense, all the little services which had been dealt in and which

were not to be mentioned aloud—all was gliding to the abandonment of ruin. And the wretchedness had reached such a point that the dried herbs suspended from the ceiling swarmed with spiders, and that defunct leeches, which had already turned green, floated on the tops of the glass jars.

"Hallo, here he comes!" resumed the sculptor. "You'll see her arrive at his heels."

In fact, Chaîne came in. With a great show he drew a paper of tobacco from his pocket, filled his pipe, and began to smoke in front of the stove, obstinately silent, as if there were no one present. And immediately afterwards Mathilde made her appearance like a neighbor who comes in to say good-morning. Claude thought that she had grown still thinner, her face bloodshot beneath the skin, her eyes all afire, her mouth seemingly enlarged by the loss of two more teeth. The smell of the aromatic herbs which she always carried in her uncombed hair seemed to have become rancid; it was no longer the sweetness of camomiles, the freshness of aniseseed. She filled the place with that smell of peppermint which seemed to be her very breath, but which had turned as if corrupted by the flesh that exhaled it.

"Already at work!" she exclaimed. "Good-morning, pet." And, without minding Claude, she kissed Mahoudeau. Then she went to shake hands with the painter. And she continued:

"What do you think? I have found a box of mallow root, and we will treat ourselves to it for breakfast. Ain't I nice? We'll share."

"Thanks," said the sculptor, "it makes my mouth sticky. I prefer smoking a pipe."

And, seeing that Claude was putting on his coat again, he asked:

"Are you going?"

"Yes. I want to take the rust off me, to breathe the air of Paris a bit."

All the same, he stopped for another few minutes, watching Chaîne and Mathilde, who were stuffing themselves with mallow root, each taking a piece by turns. And though he had been warned, he was again amazed when he saw Mahoudeau take up the stick of charcoal and write on the wall: "Give me the tobacco you have shoved into your pocket."

Without a word, Chaîne took out the paper and handed it to the sculptor, who filled his pipe.

"Well, I'll see you again soon," said Claude.

"Yes, soon. At any rate, next Thursday, at Sandoz's."

Outside, Claude gave an exclamation of surprise on jostling a gentleman, who was stuck in front of the herbalist's, absorbed in peering into the shop, between the stained and dusty surgical bandages in the windows.

"What, Jory! What are you doing there?"

Jory's big pink nose gave a sniff in dismay.

"I—nothing—I was passing and looked in."

Then he decided to laugh, and, as if there were any one to overhear him, lowered his voice to ask:

"She is next door with our friends, isn't she? All right! let's be off, quick. It will be for another day."

And he took the painter with him, telling him all manner of stuff. The whole band came to see Mathilde now-a-days. One had told the other, and they went there in turns, sometimes several at a time, if the whim took them. There were perfect horrors going on there, extraordinary things which he whispered into Claude's ear, abruptly stopping him on the pavement, amidst the jostling of the crowd.

"But you declared that woman to be frightful," said Claude, laughing.

Jory made a gesture implying that he didn't care. "Oh!" he answered, "she pleases! For instance, myself,

I was coming back from the Montparnasse station just now, where I had been to see somebody off. And it was on passing along the street that I had the idea of profiting by the opportunity to see her. You understand, a fellow doesn't go out of his way expressly."

He proffered these explanations with an air of embarrassment. But, all at once, the candor of his vice drew a cry of truth from him—from him who always lied.

"And, dash it, after all, if you want to know the truth, I think her extraordinary—stunning! Not good-looking, no doubt, but bewitching. In short, one of those women a fellow pretends not to touch with a pair of tongs, and for whom he commits the most monstrous follies."

Then, and then only, he expressed his surprise at seeing Claude in Paris, and, when he had been fully posted, and learned that the painter meant to remain there for good, he said all at once:

"Listen, I am going to take you with me. You are coming to breakfast with me at Irma's."

The painter, taken aback, refused energetically, and gave as a reason that he wasn't even wearing a frockcoat.

"What does that matter? On the contrary, it makes it more droll. She'll be delighted. I believe she is spoons upon you. She is always talking about you to us. Come, don't be a fool. I tell you she expects me this morning, and we shall be received like princes."

He did not relax his hold on Claude's arm, and they both continued their way towards the Madeleine, talking all the while. As a rule, Jory kept silent about his flirtations, just as a drunkard keeps silent about his potations. But on that morning he brimmed over with revelations, chaffed himself and owned to

all sorts of adventures. He had long since broken off with the music-hall singer, whom he had brought from his native town, the one who had skinned his face with her nails. And now, from one year's end to another, there was a breakneck gallop of women across his existence; women of the most unexpected and extravagant kind: the cook of a middle-class family with whom he dined now and then; the spouse of a police constable, whose hours of duty he had to watch for; a young girl employed at a dentist's, where she earned sixty francs a month for allowing herself to be sent asleep and awakened before every patient, in order to inspire the latter with confidence; and others still, nondescript girls from public balls; "respectable" women in quest of adventures; the little laundress girls who brought home his washing; the charwomen who made his bed; all those who had a mind for amusement; the chance meetings of the streets, all that offered themselves or that could be decoyed; and it was all pot luck, the pretty, the ugly, the young and the old, indiscriminately.

After all he was delighted with his existence, his affairs went apace. His miserly father had certainly cut off the supplies once more, cursing him for obstinately pursuing his scandalous career, but he did not care a rap for that now; he earned between seven and eight thousand francs a year by journalism, in which he was making his way as a gossipy leader writer and art critic. The noisy days of "The Drummer," the articles at a louis apiece had been left far behind. He was getting steady; wrote for two widely circulated papers, and although, in his inmost heart, he remained a skeptical voluptuary, a worshipper of success at any price, he was acquiring importance, and readers began to look upon his opinions as fiats. Swayed by his hereditary meanness, he already invested money each month in petty speculations only known to himself,

for never had his vices cost him less than now-a-days. Even on mornings of especial generosity, he never stood more than a cup of chocolate.

As they reached the Rue de Moscou, Claude asked:

"So it's you who protects this little Bécot?"

"I!" exclaimed Jory, indignantly. "But, old man, she pays twenty thousand francs' rent, and talks of building a house that will cost five hundred thousand! No, no! I sometimes lunch and dine with her; it's quite enough. Come, here we are. In with you, quick."

But Claude still objected. His wife was waiting for him to breakfast; he really couldn't. And Jory was obliged to ring the bell, and then pushed him inside the hall, repeating that his excuse would not do; that they would send the valet to the Rue de Douai to tell his wife. A door opened and they found themselves face to face with Irma Bécot, who uttered a cry of surprise when she perceived the painter.

"What! is it you, savage?"

She made him feel at home at once by treating him like an old chum, and, in fact, he saw well enough that she did not even notice his old coat. He himself was astonished, for he barely recognized her. In four years she had become a different being, her head "made up" with an actress' skill, her forehead hidden beneath her curled hair, her face elongated, by a sheer effort of will, no doubt. And from the pale blonde she had been she had become flaringly carroty; so that a Titianesque woman now seemed to have sprung from the little urchin-like girl of former days. As she herself said at times, that was her head for "flats." The house, with all its show of luxury, still had its bald spots. What struck the painter were some good pictures on the walls, a Courbet, and, above all, an unfinished study by Delacroix. She was not altogether a fool, then, this creature, despite a frightful cat in

colored biscuit ware, displayed on a console in the drawing-room?

When Jory spoke of sending the valet to his friend's place, she exclaimed in great surprise:

"What! you are married?"

"Why, yes," said Claude, simply.

She glanced at Jory, who smiled; then she understood and added:

"But why did people tell me that you held women in horror? And you know that I am awfully vexed, I who frightened you, do you remember, eh? You think me very ugly then, that you are still drawing back?"

She had taken both his hands in hers, bringing her face close to his, smiling, but really hurt at heart, looking closely into his eyes with the determined wish to please.

It was the coachman who went to the Rue de Douai with a note from Claude, for the valet had opened the door of the dining-room to announce that lunch was served. The repast a very delicate one, was partaken of in all propriety, under the cold stare of the servant. They talked about the great building works that were revolutionizing Paris; and they then discussed the price of land, like middle-class people with money to invest. But at dessert, when they were all three alone with the coffee and liqueurs which they had decided upon taking there, without leaving the table, they became gradually animated, they dropped into the old familiar style, as if they had met each other at the Café Baudequin.

"Ah, my children," said Irma, "this is the only real enjoyment, to be jolly together and to snap one's fingers at other people."

She was twisting cigarettes; she had just placed the bottle of chartreuse near her, and had begun to empty

it, looking very flushed, her hair flying about, and lapsing once more to her low street drollery.

"So," continued Jory, who was apologizing for not having sent her that morning a book she wanted, "I was going to buy it last night at about ten o'clock when I met Fagerolles—"

"You are telling a lie," she said, interrupting him in a clear voice. And to cut short his protestations: "Fagerolles was here, so you see that you are telling a lie." Then, turning to Claude: "No, it's too disgusting. You can't conceive what a liar he is. He tells lies like a woman, for the pleasure of it, for the meanest trifle. Now, the whole of his story amounts simply to this: that he didn't want to spend three francs to buy me that book. Each time he was to have sent me a bouquet, he had dropped it under the wheels of a carriage, or there were no flowers to be had in all Paris. Ah! there's a fellow whom one has to love for himself."

Jory, without getting in the least angry, tilted back his chair and balanced it, sucking his cigar. He merely said with a sneer:

"If you have made it up with Fagerolles—"

"I have not made it up at all," she cried, becoming furious. "And, besides, it's no business of yours. I snap my fingers at your Fagerolles! Do you hear? He knows very well that people don't quarrel with me. We know each other."

She was growing animated. He thought it prudent to beat a retreat.

"My Fagerolles," he muttered, "my Fagerolles!"

"Yes, your Fagerolles. Do you think that I don't see through you both; he, always patting you on the back as he hopes to get articles out of you, and you affecting generosity and calculating the profit you'll derive if you write up an artist liked by the public?"

This time Jory stuttered, feeling very much annoyed

on account of Claude being there. He did not attempt to defend himself, however, preferring to turn the quarrel into a joke. Wasn't she amusing, eh, when she blazed up like that?

"Only, my dear, this sort of thing cracks your Titian-like 'make up,'" added Jory.

She began to laugh, mollified at once.

Claude, basking in physical comfort, kept on sipping one small glass of cognac after another, without noticing it. During the two hours they had been there a kind of intoxication had stolen over them, the hallucinatory intoxication produced by liqueurs amid tobacco smoke. They changed the conversation; the high prices that pictures were fetching came into question. Irma, who no longer spoke, kept a bit of extinguished cigarette between her lips, and had her eyes fixed on the painter. And she suddenly questioned him, using the familiar "thou" almost unconsciously:

"Where did'st thou find thy wife?"

This question did not appear to surprise him; his ideas were going astray.

"She had just come from the provinces," he said. "She was in a situation with a lady, and a good girl, surely."

"Pretty?"

"Why, yes, pretty."

For a moment Irma relapsed into her reverie, then she said, smiling:

"Dash it all! What a bit of luck; there were no good girls left, so it seems one was created expressly for you."

However, she shook herself, and exclaimed, rising from the table: "Nearly three o'clock! Ah! my children, I must turn you out of the house. Yes, I have an appointment with an architect; I am going to see some ground near the Parc Monceau, you know, in

the new quarter, which is being built. I have scented a stroke of business in that direction."

They had returned into the drawing-room. She stopped before a glass, annoyed at seeing herself so flushed.

"It's for that house, isn't it?" asked Jory. "You have found the money, then?"

She brought her hair down over her forehead again, then she seemed to efface with her hands the flush on her cheeks; she elongated the oval of her face, and re-arranged that tawny head of hers, which had all the intelligent charm of a work of art; finally, turning round, she merely threw Jory these words by way of reply: "Look! there's my Titian back again."

She was already, amidst the laughter, edging them towards the hall, where once more, without speaking, she took Claude's hands in her own, her look once more diving into the depths of his eyes. When in the street he felt uncomfortable. The cold air dissipated his intoxication; he remorsefully reproached himself for having spoken of Christine to that woman, and swore to himself that he would never set his feet in her house again.

"A good-natured girl, isn't she?" said Jory, lighting a cigar, which he had taken from the box before going. "Besides, you know, it doesn't bind one to anything; a fellow lunches, dines there; and then, good-morning, good-night, everybody attends to his own business."

However, a kind of shame deterred Claude from going home at once, and when his companion, excited by the luncheon and feeling inclined to loaf about, spoke of going to shake hands with Bongrand, he was delighted with the idea, and both made their way to the Boulevard de Clichy.

For the last twenty years Bongrand had there occupied a vast studio, in which he had not sacrificed

to the tastes of the day, to that magnificence of hangings and nicknacks with which young painters were beginning to surround themselves. It was the bare, grayish, old studio, exclusively ornamented with sketches by the master, hung there without frames, and in as close array as the votive offerings in a chapel. The only signs of elegance consisted in a cheval glass, of the First Empire style, a large Norman wardrobe, two arm-chairs, upholstered in Utrecht velvet, and threadbare with usage. In one corner, a bearskin which had lost all its hairs covered a large couch. However, the artist had retained since his youthful days, spent in the camp of the Romanticists, the habit of wearing a special costume, and it was in flowing trousers, in a dressing-gown secured at the waist by a silken cord, with his head covered with a priest's skull-cap, that he received his visitors.

He came to open the door himself, holding his palette and his brushes.

"So here you are! It was a good idea of yours to come! I was thinking about you, my dear fellow. Yes, I don't know who it was that told me of your return, but I said to myself that it wouldn't be long before I saw you."

The hand he had free had grasped Claude's in a burst of sincere affection. He then shook Jory's, adding:

"And you, young pontiff; I read your last article, and thank you for your kind mention of myself. Come in, come in, both of you! You don't disturb me; I'm taking advantage of the daylight up to the last minute, for there's hardly time to do anything in this confounded month of November."

He had resumed his work, standing before his easel, on which there was a small canvas; two women, mother and daughter, sitting sewing in the embrasure

of a sunlit window. The young fellows stood looking behind him.

"Exquisite," murmured Claude, at last.

Bongrand shrugged his shoulders without turning round.

"Pooh! A mere nothing at all. A fellow must occupy his time, eh? I did this from life at a friend's house, and I am cleaning it a bit."

"But it's perfect—it is a little gem of truth and light," replied Claude, warming up. "And do you know, what overcomes me is its simplicity, its very simplicity."

On hearing this the painter stepped back, and blinked his eyes, looking very surprised.

"You think so? It really pleases you? Well, when you came in I was just thinking it was a foul bit of work. I give you my word, I was in the dumps, and felt convinced that I hadn't a scrap of talent left."

His hands shook, all his stalwart frame trembled as with the agony of travail. He rid himself of his palette, and came back towards them, his arms sawing the air, as it were; and this artist, grown old amidst success, who was assured of holding a place in the French School, cried out to them:

"It surprises you, eh? but there are days when I ask myself whether I shall be able to draw a nose correctly. Yes, at every one of my pictures I still feel the emotion of the beginner; my heart beats, anguish parches my mouth, in fact, I fail abominably."

He seemed to have increased in stature, reaching to the elevated ceiling of the studio, and shaken by such deep emotion that the tears started to his eyes. And he dropped into a chair before his picture, asking with the anxious look of a beginner who has need of encouragement:

"Then this really seems to you all right? I

myself no longer dare to believe anything. My unhappiness springs from my having at the same time both too much and not enough critical acumen. The moment I begin a sketch I exalt it, then, if it's not successful, I torture myself. It would be better not to know anything at all about it, like that brute Chambouvard, or else to see very clearly into the business and then give up painting. Really now, you like this little canvas?"

Claude and Jory remained motionless, astonished and embarrassed before this sob of intense anguish of art in its travail. Had they arrived at a moment of crisis, that this master thus groaned with pain, and consulted them like comrades? The worst was that they had been unable to disguise some hesitation under the gaze of the ardent, dilated eyes with which he implored them—eyes in which one could read the hidden fear of decline. They knew current rumors well enough; they agreed with the opinion that since his "Village Wedding" the painter had produced nothing equal to that famous picture. Indeed, after having maintained that standard of excellence in a few works, he was now gliding into a more scientific, dryer manner. Brightness of color was vanishing; each work seemed to show a decline. However, these were things not to be said; so Claude, when he had recovered his composure, exclaimed:

"You never painted anything so powerful."

Bongrand looked at him again, straight in the eyes. Then he turned to his work, in which he became absorbed, making a movement with his herculean arms, as if he had broken every bone of them in lifting this little canvas which was so very light. And he muttered to himself:

"Confound it! how heavy it is! Never mind, I'll die at it rather than show a falling off."

He took up his palette and grew calm at the first

stroke of the brush, bending his manly shoulders, and the nape of his broad neck, about which one noticed traces of the peasant's obstinate build remaining amid the middle-class refinement.

A silence had ensued, but Jory, his eyes still fixed on the picture, asked:

"Is it sold?"

Bongrand replied leisurely, like the artist who works when he likes, without care of profit:

"No. I feel paralyzed when I've a dealer at my back."

And without interrupting his work, he went on talking, growing waggish:

"Ah! people are beginning to make a trade of painting now. Really and truly I have never seen such a thing before, old as I am getting. For instance, you, Mr. Amiable Journalist, what a quantity of flowers you fling to the young ones in that article in which you mentioned me? There were two or three youngsters spoken of who were simply geniuses, nothing less."

Jory burst out laughing.

"Well, when a fellow has a paper, he must make use of it. Besides, the public likes to have great men discovered for it."

Bongrand shook his head, and then started off again, amid a tremendous burst of mirth:

"No! no! one can no longer throw off the merest daub without being hailed as a young 'master.' Well, if you only knew how your young masters amuse me."

But as if these words had led to a connection of ideas, he cooled down, and turned towards Claude to ask this question: "By the way, have you seen Fagerolles' picture?"

"Yes," said the young fellow, quietly.

They both continued looking at each other: a rest-

less smile had risen to their lips, and Bongrand eventually added:

"There's a fellow who pillages you right and left."

Jory, becoming embarrassed, had lowered his eyes, asking himself whether he should defend Fagerolles. He, no doubt, concluded that it would be profitable to do so, for he began to praise the picture, that actress in her dressing-room, an engraving of which was then attracting a great deal of notice in the print shops. Was not the subject a really modern one? Was it not well-painted, in the bright, clear tone of the new school? A little more vigor might, perhaps, have been desirable; but every one ought to be left with his own temperament. And, besides, refinement and charm were not so common by any means, now-a-days.

Bending over his canvas, Bongrand, who, as a rule, had nothing but paternal praise for the young ones, shook and made a visible effort not to burst out. The explosion took place, however, in spite of himself.

"Just shut up, eh? about your Fagerolles. Do you think us greater fools than we really are! There! you see the great painter here present. Yes; I mean the young gentleman in front of you. Well, the whole trick consists in pilfering his originality, and dishing it up with the wishy-washy sauce of the School of Arts."

He brandished his palette and brushes aloft, in his clenched fists.

"You are severe," said Claude, feeling embarrassed. "Fagerolles shows delicacy in his work."

"I have been told," muttered Jory, mildly, "that he has just signed a very profitable agreement with Naudet."

The name, thrown haphazard into the conversation,

had the effect of once more soothing Bongrand, who repeated, wagging his shoulders:

"Ah! Naudet—ah! Naudet."

And he greatly amused the young fellows by telling them about Naudet, with whom he was well acquainted. He was a dealer, who, for some few years, had been revolutionizing the picture trade. There was nothing of the old game about his style—the greasy coat and keen taste of Papa Malgras, the watching for the pictures of beginners, bought at ten francs, to be resold at fifteen, all the little humdrum comedy of the connoisseur, turning up his nose at the coveted canvas, in order to depreciate it, worshipping painting in his inmost heart, and earning a meagre living by quickly turning over his petty capital in a prudent way. No, no, the famous Naudet had the appearance of a nobleman, with a fancy-pattern jacket, a diamond pin in his scarf, and patent-leather boots; he was well pomaded, and brushed; and lived in fine style—a livery-stable carriage by the month, a stall at the opera, his particular table at Bignon's, showing himself wherever it was the correct thing to be seen. For the rest of the matter, a speculator, a Stock Exchange gambler, not caring one rap about art. But he unfailingly scented success, he guessed what artist ought to be properly started, not the one who seemed likely to develop the genius of a great painter, furnishing food for discussion, but the one whose deceptive talent, set off by a pretended display of audacity, would command a premium in the market. And that was the way in which he revolutionized this market, giving the amateur of taste the cold shoulder, and only treating with the moneyed amateur, who knows nothing about art, but who buys a picture as he buys a share at the Stock Exchange, either from vanity or with the hope that it will rise in value.

At this stage of the conversation Bongrand, very

jocular by nature, and with a good deal of the mummer about him, began to enact the scene. Enter Naudet in Fagerolles' studio.

"'You've real genius, my dear fellow. Your last picture is sold, then? For how much?'

"'For five hundred francs.'

"'But you must be mad; it was worth twelve hundred. And this one which you have by you—how much?'

"'Well, my faith, I don't know. Suppose we say twelve hundred?'

"'What are you talking about? Twelve hundred francs! You don't understand me, then, my boy; it's worth two thousand. I take it at two thousand. And from this day you must work for no one but myself—for me, Naudet. Good-bye, good-bye, my dear fellow; don't overwork yourself—your fortune is made. I have taken it in hand.' Wherewith he goes off, taking the picture with him in his carriage. He trots it round among his amateurs, among whom he has spread the rumor that he has just discovered an extraordinary painter. One of the amateurs bites at last, and asks the price.

"'Five thousand.'

"'What, five thousand francs for the picture of a man whose name hasn't the least notoriety! Are you playing the fool with me?'

"'Look here, I'll make you a proposal: I'll sell it you for five thousand francs, and I'll sign an agreement to take it back in a twelvemonth at six thousand, if you no longer care for it.'

"Of course the amateur is tempted. What does he risk after all? In reality it's a good speculation, and so he buys. After that Naudet loses no time, but disposes in a similar manner of nine or ten paintings by the same man during the course of the year. Vanity gets mingled with the hope of gain, the prices go up,

the pictures get regularly quoted, so that when Naudet returns to see his amateur, the latter, instead of returning the picture, buys another one at eight thousand francs. And the prices continue to go up, and painting degenerates into something shady, a kind of gold mine situated on the heights of Montmartre, promoted by a number of bankers, and around which there is the battle of bank notes."

Claude was growing indignant, but Jory thought it all very clever, when there came a knock at the door. Bongrand, who went to open it, uttered a cry of surprise.

"Naudet, as I live! We were just talking about you."

Naudet, very correctly dressed, without a speck of mud, despite the horrible weather, bowed and came in with the reverential politeness of a man of society entering a church.

"Very much pleased—feel flattered, indeed, dear master. And you only spoke well of me, I'm sure of it."

"Not at all, Naudet, not at all," said Bongrand, in a quiet tone. "We were saying that your manner of trading was giving us a nice generation of artists—tricksters crossed with dishonest business men."

Naudet smiled, without losing his composure.

"The remark is harsh, but so charming! Never mind, never mind, dear master, nothing that you say offends me." And, dropping into ecstasy before the picture of the two little women at needlework: "Ah! good heavens, I didn't know this! It's a little marvel! Ah! that light, that broad substantial treatment! One has to go back to Rembrandt for anything like it; yes, to Rembrandt! Look here, I only came in to pay my respects, but I thank my lucky star for having brought me here. Let us do a little bit of business. Let me have this gem. Anything you like to ask for it. I'll cover it with gold."

One could see Bongrand's back shake, as if his irritation were increasing at each sentence. He curtly interrupted the dealer:

"Too late; it's sold."

"Sold, you say. And you cannot annul your bargain? Tell me, at any rate, to whom it's sold. I'll do everything, I'll give anything. Ah! What a horrible blow. Sold, are you quite sure of it? Suppose you were offered double the sum?"

"It's sold, Naudet. That's enough, isn't it?"

However, the dealer went on lamenting. He remained for a few minutes longer, going into raptures before other sketches, making the tour of the studio with the keen glances of a bettor in search of luck. When he realized that his time was badly chosen, and that he would take nothing away with him, he went off, bowing with an air of gratitude, and repeating remarks of admiration as far as the landing.

As soon as he had gone, Jory, who had listened to the conversation with surprise, ventured to ask a question:

"But you told us I thought—It isn't sold, is it?"

Without immediately answering, Bongrand went back to his picture. Then, in his thundering voice, resuming all his hidden suffering, the whole of the nascent struggle he dared not avow, in one cry:

"He plagues me. He shall never have anything. Let him go and buy of Fagerolles!"

A quarter of an hour later, Claude and Jory also said good-bye, leaving him struggling with his work in the waning daylight. Once outside, when the former had left his companion, he did not at once return home to the Rue de Douai, in spite of his long absence. He still felt the want of walking about, of yielding himself up to this Paris, where the meetings of one single day sufficed to fill his brain; and this need of motion made him wander about till the black

night had fallen, through the frozen mud of the streets, beneath the flaring gas-lamps, lighted up one by one, like nebulous stars amidst the fog.

Claude impatiently awaited the Thursday when he was to dine at Sandoz's, for the latter, immutable in his habits, still invited his cronies once a week. All those who chose could come, their places were laid. His marriage, his change of life, the ardent literary struggle into which he had thrown himself, made no difference; he kept to his day "at home," that Thursday which dated from his leaving the college, from the time they had smoked their first pipes. As he himself expressed it, alluding to his wife, there was only one chum more.

"I say, old man," he had frankly said to Claude, "I'm greatly worried—"

"What about?"

"You are not married—Oh! as for me, you know, I would willingly invite your wife. But there are a lot of idiots, a lot of Philistines watching me, who would relate all manner of abominable things—"

"You are perfectly right, old man. But Christine herself would decline to come to your place—oh! we understand the thing very well. I'll come alone, depend upon it."

At six o'clock, Claude started for Sandoz's, Rue Nollet, in the depths of Batignolles, and he had no end of trouble in finding the small pavilion his friend occupied. First of all he entered a large house facing the street, and applied to the doorkeeper, who made him cross three court-yards; then he went along a passage, between two other buildings, descended some steps, and tumbled upon the iron gate of a small garden. That was the spot, the pavilion was there at the end of a path. But it was so dark, he had nearly broken his legs coming down the steps, that he dared not venture any further, the more so as a huge dog

was barking furiously. At last he heard the voice of Sandoz, who was coming forward, trying to quiet the dog.

"Ah, it's you! We are quite in the country, aren't we? We are going to put up a lantern, so that our company may not break their necks. Come in, come in. Will you hold your noise, you brute of a Bertrand? Don't you see that it's a friend, fool?"

Thereupon the dog accompanied them as far as the pavilion, wagging his tail and barking joyously. A young servant girl had come out with a lantern, which she fastened to the gate, in order to light up the breakneck steps. In the garden there was only a small central lawn, on which there stood a large plum tree, diffusing shade that rotted the grass; and before the low house, showing only three windows, in front, there stretched an arbor of Virginia creeper, with a brand new seat shining there as an ornament amid the winter showers and awaiting the advent of the summer sun.

"Come in," repeated Sandoz.

On the right hand side of the hall he ushered Claude into the parlor, which he had turned into a study. The dining-room and kitchen were on the left. Up-stairs, his mother, who was now altogether bedridden, occupied the larger room, while the young couple contented themselves with the other one, and the dressing-room dividing the two. And that was all, a real cardboard box, with rooms like little drawers separated by partitions as thin as paper. Withal, the abode of work and hope, and vast in comparison with the garrets of youth, already made bright by a beginning of comfort and luxury.

"There's room here, eh?" he exclaimed. "Ah! it's a jolly sight more comfortable than in the Rue d'Enfer. You see I've a room to myself. And I have bought myself an oaken writing-table, and my

wife made me a present of that dwarf palm in that pot of old Rouen ware. Isn't it swell, eh?"

His wife came in at that very moment. Tall, with a pleasant, tranquil face, and beautiful brown hair, she wore a large white apron over her plainly made dress of black poplin; for although they had a regular servant, she saw to the cooking, being proud of certain dishes, and putting the household on a footing of middle-class cleanliness and love of cheer.

She and Claude were old chums at once.

"Call him Claude, my darling. And you, old man, call her Henriette. No madame nor monsieur; or I shall fine you five sous each time."

They laughed, and she scampered away, being wanted in the kitchen to look after a southern dish, a bouillabaisse, with which she wished to surprise the Plassans friends. She had obtained the recipe from her husband himself, and had become marvellously deft at it, so he said.

"Your wife is charming," said Claude, "and I see she spoils you."

But Sandoz, seated at his table, his elbows among such pages of the book he was working at as he had written that morning, began to talk of the first novel of his series, which he had published in October. Ah! they had treated his poor book nicely! It had been a throttling, a butchering, all the critics yelling at his heels, a broadside of imprecations, as if he had murdered people in a wood. He himself laughed at it, excited rather than otherwise, his shoulders solid, and having the quiet bearing of the toiler who knows what he's after. Merely surprise remained to him at the profound lack of intelligence shown by these fellows, whose articles, knocked off on the corner of some table, bespattered him with mud, without appearing as much as to guess at the least of his intentions. Everything was flung into the same slop-pail of

abuse; his new study of physiological man; the important part he assigned to circumstances and surroundings; his allusions to nature, ever and ever creating; in short, life—entire, universal life—existent through all the animal world without there really being either high or low, beauty or ugliness; he was insulted, too, for his boldness of language, the conviction that everything should be said, that there are abominable expressions that become necessary like branding irons, that a language emerges enriched from such strength-giving baths. He easily granted their anger, but he would at least have liked them to do him the honor of understanding him and getting angry at his audacity, not at the idiotic designs of which he was accused.

"Really," he continued, "I believe that the world still contains more idiots than downright spiteful people. They are enraged with me on account of the form I give to my productions, the written sentences, the similes, the very life of the style. Yes, the middle-classes fairly split with hatred of literature."

Then he became silent, having grown sad.

"Never mind," said Claude, after an interval, "you are happy, you at least work, you produce."

Sandoz had arisen from his seat with a gesture of sudden pain.

"True, I work. I work out my books to their last page. But if you only knew, if I told you amidst what discouragement, amidst what torture! Won't these idiots take it into their heads to accuse me of pride! I, whom the imperfection of my work pursues even in my sleep—I, who never look over the pages of the day before, lest I should find them so execrable that I might afterwards lack the courage to continue. Oh, I work, no doubt, I work! I go on working, as I go on living, because I am born to it, but I am not any the gayer on account of it. I am never

satisfied; there is always the great collapse at the end."

He was interrupted by a loud voice outside, and Jory appeared, delighted with life, and relating that he had just touched up an old article in order to have this evening to himself. Almost immediately afterwards Gagnière and Mahoudeau, who had met at the door, came in conversing together. The former, who had been absorbed for some months in a theory of colors, was explaining his system to the other.

Claude, interested at once, was already questioning him, when the servant brought in a telegram.

"All right," said Sandoz, "it's from Dubuche, who apologizes; he promises to come and surprise us at about eleven o'clock."

At this moment Henriette threw the door wide open, and personally announced that dinner was ready. She had doffed her white apron, and cordially shook hands, as hostess, with all of them. "Take your seats! take your seats!" It was half-past seven already, the bouillabaisse couldn't wait. Jory, having observed that Fagerolles had sworn to him that he would come, they would not hear of it. Fagerolles was getting ridiculous with his way of aping the great artist overwhelmed with work!

The dining-room into which they passed was so small that, in order to make room for a piano, a kind of alcove had had to be made out of a dark closet which had formerly served for the accommodation of crockery. However, on grand occasions half-a-score of people still gathered round the table, under the white porcelain suspension lamp, but this was only accomplished by blocking up the sideboard, so that the servant could not even pass to take a plate from it. Besides, it was the mistress of the house who carved, while the master took his place facing her,

against the blockaded sideboard, in order to take from it and hand round whatever things were required.

Henriette had placed Claude on her right hand, Mahoudeau on her left, while Gagnière and Jory were seated next to Sandoz.

"Françoise," she called out, "give me the slices of toast. They are on the range."

And the girl having brought the toast, she distributed two slices to each of them, and she was beginning to pour the bouillabaisse into the plates, when the door opened once more.

"Fagerolles at last!" she said. "I have given your seat to Mahoudeau. Sit down there next to Claude."

He apologized with an air of courtly politeness, by alleging a business appointment. Very elegantly dressed, tightly buttoned up in clothes of an English cut, he had the carriage of a man about town, relieved by a touch of artistic free-and-easiness which he had preserved. Immediately on sitting down he grasped his neighbor's hand, affecting great delight.

"Ah, my old Claude! I have for such a long time wanted to see you. A score of times I intended to go after you into the country; but then, you know, circumstances—"

Claude, feeling uncomfortable at these protestations, endeavored to meet them with a like cordiality. But Henriette, who was still serving, saved the situation by growing impatient.

"Come, Fagerolles, just answer me. Do you wish for two slices of toast?"

"Certainly, madame, two, if you please. I am very fond of bouillabaisse. Besides, yours is delicious, a marvel!"

In fact, they all went into raptures over it, especially Jory and Mahoudeau, who declared they had never tasted anything better at Marseilles; so much so that the young wife, delighted and still flushed with the

heat of the kitchen, her ladle in her hand, had all she could do to refill the plates held out to her, and, indeed, she rose up and ran in person to the kitchen to fetch the remains of the soup, for the servant girl was losing her wits.

"Come, eat something," said Sandoz to her. "We'll wait well enough till you have done."

But she was obstinate and remained standing.

"Never mind me. You had better pass the bread—yes, there, behind you on the sideboard. Jory prefers crumb which he can soak in the soup."

Sandoz got up in his turn and assisted his wife while the others chaffed Jory on his love for sops. And Claude, moved by the pleasant cordiality of his hosts, and awaking, as it were, from a long sleep, looked at them all, asking himself whether he had only left them on the previous night, or whether it was really four years since he had dined there one Thursday. They were different, however; he felt them to be changed. Mahoudeau soured by poverty, Jory wrapt up in his own pleasures, Gagnière more distant, with his thoughts elsewhere. And it especially seemed to him that Fagerolles, near by, exhaled a chill, in spite of his exaggerated cordiality. No doubt their features had aged somewhat amid the wear and tear of life; but it was not only that, it seemed as if there was a void between them; he beheld them isolated and estranged from each other, although seated elbow to elbow in close array round the table. Then the surroundings were different; now-a-days, a woman brought her charm to bear on them, and calmed them by her presence. Then why had he, face to face with this irrevocable current of things, which die and are renewed, this sensation of beginning over again—why could he have sworn that he had been seated at that same place only last Thursday? At last he thought he understood. It was Sandoz who had not changed, as obsti-

nate as regards his habits of friendship, as regards his habits of work, as radiant at being able to receive his friends at the board of his new home as he had formerly been, when sharing his frugal bachelor fare with them. A dream of eternal friendship made him immutable. Thursdays similar one to another followed and followed on until the furthest stages of their lives. All of them eternally together, all started at the self-same hour, and participating in the same triumph!

Sandoz must have guessed the thought that kept Claude mute, for he said to him across the table, with his frank, youthful smile:

"Well, old man, here you are again! Ah, confound it! we missed you sorely. But, you see, nothing is changed; we are all the same—aren't we, all of you?"

They answered by nodding their heads, no doubt, no doubt!

"With this difference," he went on, beaming as it were, "with this difference, that the cookery is somewhat better than in the Rue d'Enfer! What a lot of messes I did make you swallow!"

After the bouillabaisse there came a civet of hare; and a roast fowl and salad terminated the dinner. But they sat for a long time at table, and the dessert proved a protracted affair, although the conversation lacked the fever and violence of yore. Every one spoke of himself and ended by relapsing into silence on perceiving that no one listened to him. With the cheese, however, when they had tasted some Burgundy wine, a sharp little growth which the young couple had ordered a cask of, on the strength of the profits of the first novel, their voices rose to a higher key, and they all grew animated.

"So you have made an arrangement with Naudet, eh?" asked Mahoudeau, whose bony starveling's cheeks seemed to have grown still more hollow. "Is

it true that he guarantees you fifty thousand francs for the first year?"

Fagerolles replied, with affected carelessness: "Yes, fifty thousand francs. But nothing is settled; I'm thinking it over. It is hard to engage one's self like that. I am not going to do anything precipitately."

"The devil!" muttered the sculptor, "you are hard to please. For twenty francs a day I'd sign whatever you like."

They all now listened to Fagerolles, who posed as being wearied out by his budding success. He still had the same good-looking, disturbing face, but the way he wore his hair and the cut of his beard lent him an appearance of gravity. Although he still came at long intervals to Sandoz's, he was separating from the band; he showed himself on the boulevards, frequented the cafés and newspaper offices, all the places where a man can advertise himself and make useful acquaintances. These were tactics of his own, a determination to cut out his own victory apart from the others; the smart idea that if he wished to triumph he ought to have nothing more in common with these revolutionists, neither a dealer, connections, nor habits. It was even said that he had interested the female element of two or three drawing-rooms in his success, not in Jory's style, but like a fellow who rises superior to his passions, and merely tickles the fancies of superannuated baronesses.

Just then Jory, in view of lending importance to himself, called his attention to a recently published article; the journalist pretended to have made Fagerolles just as he pretended to have made Claude. "I say, have you read that article of Vernier's on yourself? There's another fellow who repeats my ideas!"

"Ah! he does get articles, and no mistake!" sighed Mahoudeau.

Fagerolles made a careless gesture, but he smiled

with secret contempt for these poor beggars who were so utterly deficient in shrewdness that they persisted, like simpletons, in their crude style, when it was so easy to conquer the crowd. Had he not merely had to break with them, after pillaging them? He benefited by all the hatred that folks had against them; his pictures, of a softened, attenuated style, were held up in praise, so as to deal the death-blow to their works, ever obstinately violent.

"Have you read Vernier's article!" asked Jory of Gagnière. "Doesn't he say exactly what I said?"

For the last few moments Gagnière had been absorbed in contemplating his glass, the wine in which cast a ruddy reflection on the white table-cloth. He started.

"Eh, what, Vernier's article?"

"Why, yes; in fact, all those articles which appear about Fagerolles."

Gagnière in amazement turned to the painter.

"What, they are writing articles about you? I know nothing about them, I haven't seen them. Ah, they are writing articles about you, but what for?"

There was a mad roar of laughter. Fagerolles alone grinned with an ill grace, for he fancied himself the butt of some spiteful joke. But Gagnière spoke in absolute good faith. He felt surprised at the success of a painter who did not even observe the laws respecting the value of tints. Success for that trickster! Never! What would become of conscientiousness?

This boisterous hilarity enlivened the end of the dinner. They all left off eating, though the mistress of the house still insisted upon filling their plates.

"My dear, do attend to them," she kept saying to Sandoz, who had grown very excited amidst the dinner. "Just stretch out your hand; the biscuits are on the sideboard."

They all declined anything more, and rose up. As

the rest of the evening was spent there, round the table, drinking tea, they leaned back against the walls and continued chatting while the servant cleared away. The young couple assisted, she putting away the salt-cellars in a drawer, he helping to fold the cloth.

"You can smoke," said Henriette. "You know that it doesn't inconvenience me in the least."

Fagerolles, who had drawn Claude into the window recess, offered him a cigar, which was declined.

"True, I forgot; you don't smoke. And, I say, I must go to see what you have brought back with you. Some very interesting things, no doubt. You know what I think of your talent. You are the cleverest of us all."

He showed himself very humble, sincere at heart, and allowing his admiration of former days to rise once more to the surface; indeed, he forever bore the imprint of another's genius which he admitted, despite the complex calculations of his cunning. But his humility was mingled with a certain embarrassment very rare with him—the concern he felt at the silence which the master of his youth preserved respecting his picture. At last he ventured to ask, with quivering lips:

"Have you seen my actress at the Salon? Do you like that? Tell me candidly."

Claude hesitated for a moment; then, like the good-natured fellow he was, he said:

"Yes, there are some very good bits in it."

Fagerolles already repented having asked that stupid question, and he ended by altogether floundering; he tried to excuse himself, to exculpate his plagiarisms, and to defend his compromises. When with great difficulty he had got out of the mess, enraged with himself for his clumsiness, he for a moment became the joker of yore again, made even Claude laugh till

he cried, and amused them all. Then he held out his hand to take leave of Henriette.

"What, going so soon?"

"Alas! yes, dear madame. My father is entertaining this evening the head of a department at one of the ministries, an official whom he's trying to influence in view of obtaining a decoration; and, as I am one of his titles to that distinction, I had to promise that I would look in."

When he was gone, Henriette, who had exchanged a few words in a low voice with Sandoz, disappeared; and her light footfall was heard on the first floor. Since her marriage it was she who tended the old, infirm mother, absenting herself like this several times during the evening, just as the son had done formerly.

Not one of the guests, however, had noticed her leave the room. Mahoudeau and Gagnière were talking about Fagerolles; showing themselves covertly bitter, without openly attacking him. As yet they contented themselves with ironical glances at one another, shrugging their shoulders, with the silent contempt of fellows who don't wish to slash a chum. Then they fell back on Claude; they prostrated themselves before him, overwhelmed him with the hopes they set in him. Ah! it was high time for him to come back, for he alone, with his gifts of a great painter, his vigorous touch, could become the master, the recognized chief. Since the Salon of the Rejected the school of the "Open Air" had increased in numbers; a growing influence was making itself felt; but, unfortunately, the efforts were frittered away; the new recruits contented themselves with producing sketches, impressions thrown off with a few strokes of the brush; they were awaiting the necessary man of genius, the one who would incarnate the new formula in masterpieces. What a position to take!—to master the crowd, to open up a century, to create a new art! Claude

listened to them, his eyes bent to the ground, his face grown pale. Yes, that, indeed, was his unavowed dream, the ambition he dare not confess to himself. Only with the delight that the flattery caused him there was mingled a strange anguish, a dread of the future, as he heard them raising him to the position of dictator as if he had already triumphed.

"Don't," he exclaimed at last; "there are others as good as myself. I am still seeking my real vein."

Jory, annoyed, was smoking in silence. Suddenly, as the others obstinately kept at it, he could not refrain from remarking:

"All this, my boys, is because you are vexed at Fagerolles' success."

They energetically denied it; they burst out in protestations. Fagerolles! the young master! What a good joke!

"Oh, you are turning your back upon us, we know it," said Mahoudeau. "There's no fear of your writing a line about us now-a-days."

"Well, my dear fellow," answered Jory, vexed, "everything I write about you is cut out. You make yourselves hated everywhere. Ah! if I had a paper of my own!"

Henriette came back, and Sandoz's eyes having sought hers, she answered him with a glance, with the same affectionate, quiet smile that he had shown when leaving his mother's room in former times. Then she summoned them all. They sat down again round the table while she made the tea and poured it out. But the gathering grew sad, benumbed, as it were, with lassitude. Sandoz vainly tried a diversion by letting in Bertrand, the big dog, who grovelled at sight of the sugar-basin, and ended by going to sleep near the stove, where he snored like a man. Since the discussion on Fagerolles there were intervals of silence, a kind of bored irritation, which fell heavily

upon them, amidst the dense tobacco smoke. And, in fact, Gagnière felt so out of sorts that he left the table for a moment to seat himself at the piano, murdering some passages from Wagner in a subdued key, with the stiff fingers of an amateur who tries his first scale at thirty.

Towards eleven o'clock Dubuche, arriving at last, gave the finishing stroke towards freezing the gathering. He had made his escape from a ball to fulfil what he considered a remaining duty towards his old comrades; and his dress-coat, his white necktie, his fat, pale face, simultaneously evinced his vexation at having come, the importance he attached to the sacrifice, the fear he felt of compromising his newly acquired position. He avoided mentioning his wife, so as not to have to bring her to Sandoz's. When he had shaken hands with Claude, without showing more emotion than if he had met him the day before, he declined a cup of tea and spoke slowly—puffing out his cheeks—of the worry of his settling in a brand new house; of the work that overwhelmed him since he attended to the business of his father-in-law, who was building a whole street near the Parc Monceau.

Then Claude felt distinctly that something had snapped. Had life already carried away the evenings of yore, so fraternal in their very violence, when nothing had as yet separated them, when not one had thought of keeping his part of glory to himself? Now-a-days the battle was beginning. Each starveling was giving his bite. The fissure was there, the scarcely perceptible crack that had rent the old, sworn friendships, and which would make them fall some day into a thousand pieces.

However, Sandoz, with his craving for perpetuity, had noticed nothing so far; he still saw them as they had been in the Rue d'Enfer, all arm in arm, starting off to victory. Why change what was well? Did not

happiness consist in one pleasure selected from among all, and then enjoyed forever afterwards? And when, an hour later, the comrades made up their minds to go off, rendered sleepy by the dull egotism of Dubuche, who had not left off talking about his own affairs; when they had dragged Gagnière, in a trance, away from the piano, Sandoz, followed by his wife, absolutely insisted, despite the coldness of the night, on accompanying them to the gate at the end of the garden. He distributed shakes of the hand, and shouted after them:

"Till Thursday, Claude; till next Thursday, all of you, eh? Mind you all come!"

"Till Thursday!" repeated Henriette, who had taken the lantern and was holding it aloft so as to light up the steps.

And, amid the laughter, Gagnière and Mahoudeau replied jokingly:

"Till Thursday, young master!—good-night, young master!"

Once in the Rue Nollet, Dubuche immediately hailed a cab in which he drove away. The other four walked together as far as the outer boulevards, scarcely exchanging a word, looking dazed, as it were, at having been in each other's company so long. A girl having passed them on the boulevard, Jory went off behind her, after pretending that some proofs were waiting for him at the office of his newspaper. Gagnière mechanically stopped Claude in front of the Café Baudequin, the gas of which was still blazing away. Mahoudeau refused to go in, and went off alone, sadly ruminating, towards the Rue du Cherche-Midi.

Without knowing how, Claude found himself seated at their old table, opposite Gagnière, who was silent. The café had not changed. The friends still met there of a Sunday, showing a deal of fervor, in fact,

since Sandoz had lived in the neighborhood; but the band was now lost amid a flood of new-comers; it was gradually becoming submerged beneath the rising triteness of the young disciples of the "Open Air." At this hour of night the establishment was getting empty. Three young painters, whom Claude did not know, came to shake hands with him as they went off; and then there merely remained a petty retired tradesman of the neighborhood, asleep in front of a saucer.

Gagnière, quite at his ease, as if he had been at home, absolutely indifferent to the yawns of the solitary waiter, who was stretching his arms, glanced at Claude, but without seeing him, his eyes lost in space.

"By the way," said the latter, "what were you explaining to Mahoudeau this evening? Yes, the red of a flag turning yellowish amid the blue of the sky. That was it, eh? You are studying the theory of complimentary colors."

But the other one did not answer. He took up his glass of beer, set it down again without tasting its contents, and with an ecstatic smile ended by muttering:

"Haydn has the gracefulness of the rhetorician—his is a gentle music, quivering like the voice of a great-grandmother in powdered hair. Mozart, he's the precursory genius—the first who endowed the orchestra with an individual voice; and those two will live mostly because they created Beethoven. Ah, Beethoven! power and strength in serene suffering, Michael Angelo at the tomb of the Medici! A heroic logician, a kneader of human brains; for the symphony, with choral accompaniments, has been the starting-point of all the great ones of to-day!"

The waiter, tired of waiting, began to turn off the gas, wearily dragging his feet along. A melancholy air pervaded the deserted room, dirty with cigar

ends, and exhaling the smell of the tables, sticky with spilt drink: while from the hushed boulevard no sound came but the distant blubbering of some drunkard.

Gagnière, still in the clouds, continued to ride the hobby-horse of his dreams.

"I am going to shut up, sir," repeated the waiter.

Claude, who no longer listened, he also being absorbed in his own passion, emptied his glass of beer and said very loud:

"Eh, old man, they are going to shut up."

Then Gagnière trembled. A painful twitch came over his ecstatic face, and he shivered as if he had dropped from the stars. He gulped down his beer, and then on the pavement outside, after pressing his companion's hand in silence, he went away, and disappeared amid the gloom.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when Claude returned to the Rue de Douai. For the last week that he had been scouring Paris anew, he each time brought back with him the feverish excitement of the day. But he had never as yet returned so late, with his brain so hot and smoky. Christine, overcome with fatigue, was asleep under the lamp that had gone out, her head reclining on the edge of the table.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CATASTROPHE AND A WEDDING.

AT last Christine gave a final stroke with her feather-broom, and they were settled. This studio in the Rue de Douai, small and inconvenient, had only one narrow room, and a kitchen, about as big as a cupboard, attached to it. They were obliged to take their meals in the studio; they had to live in it, with the child always tumbling about them. And she had had a deal of trouble in utilizing their few sticks, for she wanted to save expense. Nevertheless, she had been obliged to buy a second-hand bedstead; and she had even yielded to the temptation of having some white muslin curtains at seven sous the mètre. After that this whole seemed charming to her, and she began to keep it scrupulously clean, having resolved to do everything herself, and to dispense with a servant, as living would be a difficult matter.

During the first months Claude lived in ever increasing excitement. His peregrinations through the noisy streets; his feverish discussions on the occasion of his visits to his chums; all the rages and burning ideas he thus brought home from out of doors made him hold forth aloud even in his sleep. Paris had seized hold of him again in his very marrow, violently; and in the full blaze of this furnace, a second youth, an enthusiasm, an ambition to see, do, and conquer everything, had come upon him. Never had he experienced such a rage for work, such hope, as if it had sufficed for him to merely stretch out his

hand in order to create masterpieces that should set him in the right rank, the first. While crossing Paris he discovered subjects for pictures everywhere; the whole city, with its streets, open places, bridges and living horizons, stretched away in immense frescoes, which he always found too small, however, being taken with the intoxication of doing something colossal. And he returned home quivering, his brain seething with projects, throwing off sketches on bits of paper, in the lamp-light of an evening, without being able to decide where he should begin the series of grand productions he dreamt about.

One serious obstacle was the smallness of his studio. If he had only had the old garret of the Quai de Bourbon, or even the vast dining-room of Bennecourt. But what could he do in this oblong strip, in this kind of passage, which the landlord had the impudence to let to painters for four hundred francs a year, after having had it covered with glass. And the worst was that the sloping glazed roof looking to the north, between two high walls, only admitted a greenish, cellar-like light. He was therefore obliged to postpone his ambitious projects, and he decided to begin, first of all, with average-sized canvases, saying to himself that the dimensions of a picture are not a test of an artist's genius.

In fact, the moment seemed to him favorable for the success of a brave artist, who would, at length, bring some originality and sincerity into his work, amidst the breaking up of the old schools. The formulas of recent times were already shaken.

In that first hour of passion and hope, Claude, habitually so harassed by doubts, believed in his genius. He no longer experienced any of those crises, the anguish of which drove him for days into the streets, in quest of his vanished courage. A fever stiffened him, he worked with the blind obstinacy of

the artist who cuts into his entrails to drag therefrom the fruit that tortures him. His long rest in the country had endowed him with a singular freshness of visual perception, a joyous delight in execution; he seemed to have been born anew to his art, with a facility and balance of power he had not hitherto possessed. He also felt certain of progress, and experienced profound content before some successful bits of work, in which his former sterile efforts at last culminated. As he had said at Bennecourt, he had got hold of his "Open Air," of that painting of a carolling gayety of tints which astonished his comrades when they came to see him. They all admired, convinced that he would only have to show himself to take a place, and a very high one, with works of so individual a tone, in which, for the first time, nature would be shown, flooded with real light, amid the play of refraction and the constant decomposition of colors.

And, for three years, Claude struggled on, without giving in, spurred to further efforts by rebuffs, abandoning naught of his ideas, but marching straight before him with the austerity of faith.

To begin with, during the first year he went amid the December snows to station himself for four hours a day behind the heights of Montmartre, at the corner of a patch of waste land, whence he painted a miserable-looking background, some low, tumble-down buildings, overtopped by factory chimneys, and in the foreground, amid the snow, he set a girl and a street rough in rags devouring stolen apples. His obstinacy in painting from nature complicated his work terribly, burdened it with almost insuperable difficulties. However, he finished this picture outdoors; he only cleaned and touched it up a bit in his studio. When the canvas was placed beneath the wan daylight of the glazed roof, he himself was startled by its brutality.

It was like a door opened on the street. The snow blinded one. The two figures, of a muddy gray in tint, stood out, looking lamentable. He at once felt that such a picture would not be accepted, but he did not try to soften it; he sent it to the Salon all the same. After having sworn that he would never again try to exhibit, he now laid down the principle that one should always present something to the hanging committee merely to show the latter to be in the wrong. Besides, he admitted the utility of the Salon, the only battlefield on which an artist might come to the fore at one stroke. The hanging committee refused his picture.

The second year he sought for a contrast. He selected a bit of the public garden of Batignolles, in May; in the background, some large chestnut trees casting their shade, a corner of greensward and some six-storied houses; while in the foreground, on a seat of a crude green tint, some nurses and some petty cits of the neighborhood sat in a line watching three little girls making sand pies. He had needed some heroism, when permission to paint there had been obtained, to bring his work to a successful issue amid the bantering crowd. At last he made up his mind to go there at five in the morning to paint in the background; and reserving the figures, he resigned himself to making mere sketches of them, and finishing them in his studio. This time his picture seemed to him less crude; it had acquired somewhat of the wan, softened light falling through the glass roof. He thought it accepted, all his friends pronounced it to be a masterpiece, and went about saying that it would revolutionize the Salon. There was stupefaction and indignation when rumors announced a renewed refusal of the hanging committee. The premeditation could not be denied, it was a question of systematically strangling an original artist. After his first burst of

passion, he vented all his anger upon his work, which he stigmatized as false, dishonest and execrable. It was a well-deserved lesson, which he should remember: ought he to have relapsed into that cellar-like studio light? Was he going to revert to the cooking of imaginary figures? When the picture came back, he took a knife and ripped it from top to bottom.

And so the third year he obstinately toiled on a work of revolt. He wanted the blazing sun, that Paris sun, which, on certain days, turns the pavement to a white heat in the dazzling reflection of the frontages. Nowhere is it hotter; even people from burning climes mop their faces; you would say it was the soil of Africa beneath the heavily raining rays of a sky on fire. The subject he chose was a corner of the Place du Carrousel, at one o'clock in the afternoon, when the sun strikes vertically. A cab was jolting along, its driver half-asleep, its horse steaming wet, with drooping head, vague amid the throbbing heat. The passers-by seemed intoxicated, as it were, the only exception being a young woman—rosy and gay, under her parasol, who was walking along with an easy queen-like step, as if the fiery element were her proper sphere. But what especially rendered this picture terrible was the new interpretation of the effects of light, the decomposition of the sun-rays very accurately observed, and which ran counter to all common visual habits, by emphasizing blues, yellows and reds where no one had been accustomed to see any. In the background the Tuileries vanished in a golden shimmer; the paving stones bled, as it were; the figures were only so many indications, sombre patches eaten into by the over vivid glare. This time the comrades, while still praising, looked embarrassed, all seized with the same apprehensions; such painting could only lead to martyrdom. He, amidst their praises, understood well enough the rup-

ture that was taking place, and when the hanging committee had once more closed the Salon against him, he painfully exclaimed, in a moment of lucidness.

"All right; it's an understood thing—I'll die at the task!"

However, although his obstinate courage seemed to increase, he gradually relapsed now and then into his former doubts, consumed by the struggle he sustained against nature. Every canvas that came back to him seemed bad to him; above all, incomplete, not realizing what he had aimed at. It was this impotence that exasperated him even more than the refusals of the hanging committee. No doubt he did not forgive the latter; his works, even in an embryo state, were a hundred times better than the mediocrities received. But what suffering at never being able to show himself in all his strength, in the masterpiece that he couldn't bring his genius to produce! There were always some superb bits. He felt satisfied with this, that one, and the other. Why, then, were there these abrupt voids? Why these inferior bits, not perceived while at work, but afterwards, utterly killing the picture like ineffaceable defects? And he felt himself quite unable to make any corrections; at certain moments a wall rose up, an insuperable obstacle, beyond which he was forbidden to venture. If he touched up the bit a score of times, a score of times did he aggravate the evil; everything got muddled and became messy.

He grew fidgety, failed to see clearly, his brush refused to obey him, and his will was really stricken with paralysis. Did his hands or his eyes cease to be his own, amid these progressive attacks of an old disorder that had already made him anxious? The crises grew more frequent; he once more began to spend horrible weeks, consuming himself, oscillating

constantly betwixt uncertainty and hope; and his only support during these terrible hours, passed in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle with the rebellious work on hand, was the consoling dream of the future masterpiece, the one he would at last be fully satisfied with, and in painting which his hands would show proper creative skill. By some ever-recurring phenomenon, his longing to create outstripped the quickness of his fingers; he never worked at one picture without conceiving the one that was to follow. Then all that remained to him was the hasty desire to rid himself of the work on which he was engaged, and which made him agonize, as it were; no doubt it wouldn't be good for anything; he was still making fatal concessions, having recourse to trickery, to everything that an artist should banish from his conscience. But what he meant to do after that—ah! what he meant to do—he beheld it superb and heroic, above attack and indestructible. It was the everlasting mirage that goads the courage of the condemned disciples of art, a falsehood full of tenderness and pity, without which production would become impossible to all those who die of their attempts to create life!

In addition to these constantly renewed struggles with himself, material difficulties increased. Wasn't it enough that he couldn't give birth to what he felt existing within him? Must he also battle against everyday cares? Though he refused to admit it, painting from nature in the open air became impossible when a picture was above a certain size. How could he settle himself in the streets amidst the crowd?—how obtain for each personage the necessary number of sittings? This sort of painting must evidently be confined to certain determined subjects, landscapes, small corners of the city, in which the figures are but so many silhouettes, painted in afterwards. There were also the thousand and one difficul-

ties connected with the weather; the wind that carried the easel off, the rain that obliged one to interrupt one's work. On such days Claude came home in a rage, shaking his fist at the sky, accusing nature of defending herself in order not to be taken and vanquished. He complained bitterly of not being rich; for his dream was to have a movable studio, a vehicle in Paris, a boat on the Seine, in both of which he would have lived like an artistic gipsy. But nothing came to his aid, everything conspired against his work.

And Christine suffered with Claude. She had shared his hopes very bravely, brightening the studio with her housewifely activity; but now she sat down, discouraged, when she saw him powerless. At each picture refused she displayed a still deeper grief, hurt in her womanly self-love, taking that pride in success which all women have. The painter's bitterness soured her also—she espoused his passions, identified herself with his tastes, defended his painting, which had become, as it were, part of herself, the one great concern of their lives, indeed the only important one henceforth, the one from which she expected all her happiness. She understood well enough that this painting robbed her more and more of her lover each day, but the struggle between herself and art had not yet begun. She yielded, allowed herself to be carried away with him, so that they might be but one, one only in the self-same effort. From this partial abdication there sprang, however, a sadness, a dread of what was in store for her later on. Every now and then a shudder chilled her to the very heart. She felt herself grow old, while intense compassion upset her, an unreasoning longing to weep, which she satisfied in the gloomy studio for hours together, when she was alone there.

At that period her heart expanded, as it were, and

a mother sprang from the loving woman. This maternity for her big artist-child was made up of that vague infinite pity which filled her with tenderness, of the illogical fits of weakness into which she saw him fall every hour, of the constant pardons she was obliged to grant him. He was beginning to make her unhappy—she no longer received from him aught but those matter-of-fact caresses flung like alms to the woman from whom one becomes detached; and how could she continue loving him when he freed himself from her arms, when a look of weariness overspread his features amidst the ardent embraces with which she still stifled him? How could she love him if not with that other affection of every moment, remaining in adoration before him, and unceasingly sacrificing herself? There was a gentle melancholy, after the secret griefs of the night, in being merely a mother until evening, in deriving a last enjoyment from her goodness, in trying to make him happy amid this life which now was spoilt.

Little Jacques was the only one to suffer from this transfer of tenderness. She neglected him more; her flesh remained dumb for him, having only sprung into a feeling of maternity through love. It was the adored, desired man, who became her child, and the other poor little fellow only remained a simple testimony of their great passion of yore. As she had seen him grow up, and no longer require as many cares, she had begun to sacrifice him, without intentional harshness, but merely because she felt like that. At meal times she only gave him the inferior bits; the cosiest nook near the stove was not for his little chair; if the fear of an accident made her tremble now and then, the first cry, the first protecting movement was not for the helpless child. She unceasingly relegated him to the background, suppressed him, as it were: "Jacques, be quiet; you tire your

father. Jacques, keep still; don't you see that your father is at work?"

The urchin suffered from being cooped up in Paris. He, who had had the whole of the country to roll about in, was stifled in the narrow space where he had to keep quiet. His rosy cheeks became pale, he grew up puny, serious, like a little man, with eyes which stared at things in wonder. He was five by now, and his head by a singular phenomenon had become disproportionately large, so to make his father say, "He has a great man's skull!" But his intelligence seemed, on the contrary, to decrease in proportion as his skull became larger. Very gentle and timid, the child became absorbed for hours, incapable of answering a question, his mind wandering. And when he emerged from this state of immobility he had mad fits of shouting and jumping about like a young gamboling animal giving way to instinct. At such times the warnings "to keep quiet" rained upon him, for the mother failed to understand these sudden outbursts, and she became uneasy at seeing the father grow irritated before his easel, and getting cross herself, she hastily seated the little one in his corner again. Quieted all at once, with the startled shudder of a too abrupt awakening, the child dozed off again, his eyes wide open, so careless of enjoying life that his toys, corks, pictures, empty color-tubes dropped listlessly from his hands. She had already tried to teach him his alphabet, but he had cried protestingly, and they had decided to wait another year or two before sending him to school, where the masters would know how to make him learn.

Christine at last began to grow frightened at the prospect of impending poverty. In Paris, with the child growing up, living was more expensive, and the end of each month became terrible, despite her efforts to save in every direction. They had nothing certain

but the thousand francs a year; and how could they live on fifty francs a month, which was all that was left to them after deducting the four hundred francs for the rent? At first they had got out of embarrassment, thanks to the sale of a few pictures, Claude having found Gagnière's old amateur, one of those detested people of the middle-classes who possess the ardent souls of artists, despite the monomaniacal habits in which they wrap themselves up. This one, M. Hue, a retired official, was, unfortunately, not rich enough to be always buying; he could only bewail the purblindness of the public, which once more allowed a genius to die of starvation; for he himself, convinced, struck by grace at the first glance, had selected Claude's crudest works, which he hung by the side of his Delacroix, predicting an equal fortune for them. The worst was that Papa Malgras had just retired after making his fortune. It was but a modest competence, after all, an income of about ten thousand francs, which he had decided to live upon in a little house at Bois Colombes, like the careful man he was.

It was highly amusing to hear him speak of the famous Naudet with the disdain for the millions that this speculator turned over, "millions that would some day fall upon his nose," so he said. Claude, having casually met him, only succeeded in selling him a last picture, one of his academic sketches made at the Boutin studio, which the erstwhile dealer had not been able to behold afresh without feeling his old passion revive for it. So poverty was imminent; outlets were closing instead of new ones being opened; disquieting rumors were beginning to circulate concerning this painter's works constantly rejected at the Salon, and, besides, Claude's style of art, so revolutionary and imperfect, in which the startled eye found nothing of admitted conventionality, would of itself have sufficed to drive away wealthy buyers. One evening,

being unable to settle the bill at his color shop, the painter had exclaimed that he would live upon the capital of his income rather than lower himself to the degrading production of trade pictures. But Christine had violently opposed this extreme measure; she would retrench still further; in short, she preferred anything to such madness, which would end by throwing them into the streets, without even bread to eat.

After the rejection of Claude's third picture, the summer that year was so wonderfully fine that the painter seemed to derive new strength from it. Not a cloud; but limpid light streaming upon the giant activity of Paris. He had resumed his peregrinations through the city once more, determined to find a masterstroke, as he expressed it, something enormous, something decisive, he did not exactly know what. September came, and still he had found nothing, mad for a week about one subject, then declaring that it was not the thing after all. His life was spent in constant excitement, on the watch, ever on the point of setting his hand on the realization of his dream, which always flew away. In reality, beneath his intractable realism the superstitions of a nervous woman were concealed; he believed in occult and complex influences; everything was to depend upon the view selected, luck or ill-luck.

One afternoon, it was one of the last fine days of the season, Claude had taken Christine with him, leaving little Jacques in the charge of the doorkeeper, a kind old woman, as they were in the habit of doing when they wanted to go out together. It was a sudden whim to ramble about, a wish to revisit in her company the nooks beloved in other days, and behind this desire there was concealed the vague hope that she would bring him luck. And they thus went as far as the Pont Louis-Philippe, remained for a quarter of an hour on the Quai des Ormes, silent, leaning against

the parapet, and looking at the old Hôtel du Martoy, on the other side of the Seine, where they had first loved each other. Then, still without saying a word, they went their former round, gone over so many times; they started along the quays, under the plane trees, seeing the past rise up at every step. Everything was spread out before them again; the bridges with the arches opening upon the sheeny water; the Cité, enveloped in shade, above which rose the flavescent towers of Notre-Dame; the immense curve of the right bank flooded with sunlight, and terminated by the indistinct silhouette of the Pavillon de Flore, together with the broad avenues, the monuments on both banks, and the life of the river, the floating wash-houses, the baths and the lighters.

As of old, the orb in its decline followed them, seemingly rolling along the distant housetops, and acquiring a crescent shape as it appeared from behind the dome of the Institute. It was a dazzling sunset, they had never beheld a more magnificent one, a majestic descent amidst tiny cloudlets that changed into a purple network, between all the meshes of which a flood of gold escaped. But of the past that thus rose up there came to them nothing but an invincible sadness—the sensation of things constantly escaping them, the impossibility of returning up stream and living their life over again. These ancient stones remained cold, the constant current beneath the bridges, the water that had flowed onwards, seemed to have borne away something of their own selves, the delight of the first desire, the joyfulness of hope. Now that they belonged to each other, they no longer tasted the simple happiness of feeling the warm pressure of their arms as they strolled slowly along, enveloped, as it were, by the mighty vitality of Paris.

On reaching the Pont des Saints-Pères, Claude, in sheer despair, stopped short. He had abandoned

Christine's arm and had turned his face towards the point of the Cité. She, no doubt, felt the severance that was taking place and became very sad. Seeing that he lingered there obliviously, she wished to regain her hold upon him.

"My dear, let us go home; it's time. Jacques will be waiting for us, you know."

But he advanced half way along the bridge; she had to follow him. Once more he remained motionless with his eyes still fixed on the Cité, on this island, eternally riding at anchor, the cradle and heart of Paris where for centuries all the blood of her arteries has converged amid the constant growth of the faubourgs invading the plain. His face had become all aflame, his eyes sparkled, and at last he made a sweeping gesture:

"Look! look!"

In the immediate foreground beneath them was the Port of St. Nicolas, with the low shanties serving as offices for the inspectors of navigation, and the large paved river bank sloping down, littered with piles of sand, barrels, and sacks, and edged with a row of lighters, still full, in which swarmed a population of lumpers and laborers at work beneath the gigantic arm of an iron crane. Then on the other side of the river, above a cold swimming bath, resounding with the shouts of the last bathers of the season, the strips of gray linen that served as a roofing flapped in the wind. In the middle, the open stream flowed on in rippling, greenish wavelets tipped with white, blue and pink, here and there. And then there was the Pont des Arts, standing back, high above the water on its iron girders, light, like black lace work, animated by the alternate motion of foot passengers, who looked like ants careering along over the narrow line of the horizontal plane. And below the Seine flowed on to the far distance; you saw the old arches of the

Pont-Neuf, browny with stone-rust; to the left a perspective opened as far as the Isle of St. Louis, a receding mirror, of blinding foreshortening; and the other arm of the river turned sharply round, the lock gates of the Mint shut out the view with a bar of froth. Along the Pont-Neuf large yellow omnibuses, motley vehicles of all sorts, passed by with the mechanical regularity of so many children's toys. The whole of the background was enframed there, in the perspective of the two banks; on the right bank, the houses of the quays, partly hidden by a cluster of lofty trees, from behind which there emerged on the horizon a corner of the Hôtel de Ville, and the square clock tower of St. Gervais, both looking as indistinct as if they had been situated far away in the suburbs; on the left bank there was a wing of the Institute, the flat frontage of the Mint, and more trees ranged in single file.

But the real centre of this immense picture, what rose up most prominently from the stream, and occupied the sky, was the Cité, that prow of an antique vessel, ever burnished by the setting sun. Below, the poplars on the level ground that joins the two sections of the Pont-Neuf hid the statue of Henri IV. with a dense mass of green foliage. Higher up, the sun set the two lines of frontages in contrast, wrapping the gray buildings of the Quai de l'Horloge in shade, and illuming with a blaze the gilded buildings of the Quai des Orfèvres, rows of irregular houses standing out so clearly that one distinguished the smallest details, the shops, the signboards, even to the curtains at the windows. Higher up, amid the jagged outlines of the chimney stacks, behind the slanting chess-boards of the smaller roofs, the pepper-castor turrets of the Palais de Justice and the garrets of the Prefecture displayed sheets of slate, cut athwart by a colossal advertisement painted in blue

upon a wall, and the gigantic letters of which, visible to all Paris, seemed like an efflorescence of the fever of modern times sprouting on the city's forehead. Higher, higher still, betwixt the twin towers of Notre-Dame, of the color of old gold, two arrows darted upwards, the spire of the cathedral itself, and to the left the spire of the Sainte Chapelle, both looking so elegantly slim that they seemed to quiver in the breeze—the haughty topmasts, as it were, of the ancient vessel, rising into the brightness of the open sky.

"Are you coming, dear?" asked Christine, gently.

Claude still did not listen to her, this, the heart of Paris, had taken full possession of him. The splendid evening seemed to widen the horizon. There were vivid light effects, clearly defined shadows, a brightness in the precision of each detail, a transparency in the air, throbbing with gladness. And the river life, the turmoil of the quays, all the people, coming in a flood down the streets, rolling over the bridges, arriving from every side of this immense cauldron, steamed there in visible billows, with a quiver apparent in the sunlight. There was a slight breeze, a flight of small cloudlets crossing the paling azure sky, and one could hear huge and slow palpitation, the soul of Paris shed around its cradle.

Then Christine, frightened at seeing Claude so absorbed, and she herself seized with a kind of religous awe, took hold of his arm and dragged him away, as if she had felt that some great danger was threatening him.

"Let us go home. You are doing yourself harm. I want to get back."

At her touch he started like some one disturbed in sleep. Then turning his head to take a last look, he muttered:

"Ah! heavens! Ah! heavens, how beautiful!"

He allowed himself to be led away. But through the evening, first at dinner, afterwards beside the stove, and until he went to bed, he remained like one dazed, so preoccupied as not to utter half-a-dozen sentences; and Christine, failing to draw from him any answer to her questions, at last became silent also. She looked at him anxiously; was it the approach of some serious illness, had he breathed some bad air while standing midway across the bridge? His eyes stared vaguely into space, his face flushed as if with some inner straining. One would have thought it the mute travail of germination—some being springing to life within him. At first it seemed painful, confused, hampered by a thousand bonds. Then everything became disburdened; he ceased to toss about in his bed, and fell asleep with the heavy sleep of great fatigue.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, he made off, and she spent a very sorrowful day, for although she had become more easy in her mind on hearing him whistle some of his old southern tunes when he got up, she was worried by another matter which she had not mentioned to him, for fear of damping his spirits again. On that day they would for the first time lack everything; a whole week separated them from the day when they received their small income, and she had spent her last copper that morning. She had nothing left for the evening, not even the wherewithal to buy a loaf. Whom could she apply to? How could she manage to hide the truth any longer from him when he came home hungry? She made up her mind to pledge the black silk dress which Madame Vanzade had formerly given her, but it was with a heavy heart; she trembled with fear and shame at the idea of the pawnshop, that familiar resort of the poor which she had never yet entered. She was tortured by such apprehension

about the future that from the ten francs which they lent her she only deducted enough to make a sorrel soup and a stew of potatoes. On coming out of the pawn-office, a meeting with some one she knew had given her the finishing stroke.

As it happened, Claude came home very late, gesticulating merrily, his eyes very bright, excited seemingly by some secret joy; he was very hungry, and grumbled because the cloth was not laid. Then when he had sat down between Christine and little Jacques, he swallowed his soup and devoured a plateful of potatoes.

"Is that all?" he asked, when he had finished. "You might as well have added a scrap of meat. Did you have to buy some boots again?"

She stammered, not daring to tell him the truth, but hurt at heart by this injustice. He, however, went on chaffing her about the coppers she juggled away to buy herself things with; and getting more and more excited, amid the egotism of the sensations which he seemingly wished to keep to himself, he suddenly flew out at Jacques:

"Hold your noise, you confounded brat!—you drive one mad."

The child, forgetting all about his dinner, had been tapping the edge of his plate with his spoon, his eyes full of mirth, looking delighted at this music.

"Jacques, be quiet," scoldingly said the mother, in her turn. "Let your father have his dinner in peace."

And the little one, abashed, becoming very quiet at once, relapsed into gloomy stillness, with his lustreless eyes fixed on his potatoes, which he did not eat, however.

Claude made a show of stuffing himself with cheese, while Christine, quite grieved, offered to fetch some cold meat from the ham and beef shop; but he

declined, and prevented her going by words that pained her still more. Then, when the table was cleared, and they were all seated round the lamp for the evening, she sewing, the little one turning over a picture-book in silence, Claude kept drumming on the table, his mind wandering back to the spot whence he had come. Suddenly he rose up, sat down again, holding a sheet of paper and a pencil, and began sketching rapidly, in the vivid circle of light that fell from under the lamp-shade. And such was his longing to give outward expression to the tumultuous ideas beating against his skull that very soon this sketch did not suffice for his relief. On the contrary, it goaded him on, and the commotion with which he was brimming over soon rose to his lips. He finished up by unburthening his mind in a flood of words. He would have shouted to the walls; and he addressed himself to his wife because she happened to be there.

"Look, that's what we saw yesterday. It's magnificent. I spent three hours there to-day. I've got hold of what I want—something wonderful, something that'll knock everything else over. Just look! I stationed myself under the bridge; in the immediate foreground I have the Port of St. Nicolas, with its crane, its lighters which are being unloaded, its crowd of laborers. Do you see the idea—it's Paris at work—all these brawny fellows displaying their bare arms and chests? Then on the other side I have the swimming-baths—Paris at play, and some skiff there, no doubt, to occupy the centre of the composition; but of that I am not certain as yet. I must feel my way. As a matter of course, the Seine in the middle, broad, immense."

While talking, he kept on indicating the outlines vigorously with his pencil, thickening his hurried strokes over and over again, and tearing the paper in his very energy. She, in order to please him, bent

over the sketch, pretending to be very much interested in his explanations. But the sketch was getting muddled with such a labyrinth of lines, charged with such a confusion of summary details, that she failed to distinguish anything.

"You are following me, aren't you?"

"Yes, yes, very beautiful indeed."

"Then I have the background, the two arms of the river with their quays, the Cité rising up triumphantly in the centre and standing out against the sky. Ah, that background, what a marvel! One sees it every day, one passes before it without stopping; but it takes hold of one all the same; one's admiration accumulates, and one fine afternoon it appears. Nothing in the world is more grand; it is Paris herself, glorious in the sunlight—I say, what a fool I was not to think of it before! How many times I looked at it without seeing. And I had to drop there after that ramble along the quays. And, do you remember, there is a dash of shadow on that side; while here the sunrays fall quite straight. The towers are over there; the spire of the Saint-Chapelle tapers upward, as slim as a needle pointing to the sky. No, it's more to the right. Wait, I'll show you."

He began again, never wearied, but constantly retouching the sketch, and adding innumerable little characteristic details which his painter's eye had noticed; here was the red signboard of a distant shop that vibrated in the light; closer by a greenish bit of the Seine, on the surface of which some large patches of oil seemed to float; and then there was the delicate tone of a tree, the gamut of grays of the house frontages, and the luminious cast of the sky. She complaisantly approved of all he said and tried to look delighted.

But Jacques once again forgot what he had been told. After remaining silent for a long while before

his book, absorbed in the contemplation of a wood-cut depicting a black cat, he began to hum some words of his own composition: "Oh, you pretty cat; oh, you ugly cat; oh, you pretty, ugly cat;" and so on, ad infinitum, in the same lugubrious manner.

Claude, made fidgety by the buzzing noise, did not at first understand what was enervating him while he spoke. But after a time the child's harassing phrase fell clearly upon his ear.

"When you've done worrying us with your cat!" he shouted furiously.

"Hold your tongue, Jacques, when your father is talking!" repeated Christine.

"Upon my word! I do believe he is becoming an idiot. Just look at his head, if it isn't like an idiot's. It's dreadful. Just say, what do you mean by your pretty and ugly cat?"

The little fellow, turning pale and wagging hsi disproportionately large head, looked stupid, and said: "Don't know."

And as his father and mother gazed at each other with a discouraged air, he rested his cheek on the open picture-book, and remained like that, neither stirring nor speaking, but with his eyes wide open.

It was getting late; Christine wanted to put him to bed, but Claude had already resumed his explanations. He now announced to her that, the very next morning, he should go and take a sketch on the spot, simply in order to fix his ideas. And, as he went on, he began to talk of buying a small camp easel, a thing upon which he had set his heart for months. He kept harping upon the subject, and spoke about money matters. She became embarrassed, and ended by telling him everything—the last copper spent that morning; the silk dress pledged in order to dine that evening. Thereupon he became very remorseful and affectionate; he kissed her and asked her forgiveness

for having complained about the dinner. She would excuse him, surely; he would have killed father and mother, as he kept on repeating, when that confounded painting got hold of him. As for the pawnshop, it made him laugh; he defied poverty.

"I tell you that we are all right," he exclaimed. "That picture means success."

She kept silent, thinking about her meeting of the morning, which she wished to hide from him; but the words rose invincibly to her lips without apparent cause or transition, in the kind of torpor that had come over her.

"Madame Vanzade is dead," she said.

He looked surprised. Ah! really? How did she, Christine, know of it?

"I met the old man-servant. Oh, he's a gentleman by now, looking very sprightly, in spite of his seventy years. I did not know him again. It was he who spoke to me. Yes, she died six weeks ago. Her millions have gone to the various charities, with the exception of an annuity to the old servants, upon which they are living, snugly, like people of the lower middle-classes."

He looked at her, and murmured at last in a saddened voice: "My poor Christine, you are regretting now, aren't you? She would have given you a marriage portion, found you a husband; I told you so in days gone by. She would, perhaps, have left you all her money, and you wouldn't be starving with a crazy fellow like myself."

She then seemed to wake from her dream. She violently drew her chair to his, caught hold of one of his arms and nestled against him, as if her whole being protested.

"What are you saying? Oh! no; oh! no. It would have been shameful to have thought of her money. I would confess it to you, and you know that I never

tell lies, but I myself don't know what came over me when I heard the news. I felt upset, sad, so sad that I imagined that everything was over for me. It was no doubt remorse; yes, remorse at having deserted her so brutally, poor invalid that she was, the good old soul who called me her daughter. I behaved very badly, and it won't bring me luck. Ah! don't say 'No,' I feel it well enough, henceforth there's an end to everything for me."

And she wept, choked by these confused regrets, the significance of which she failed to realize, by this one feeling that her life was spoilt, that she had nothing more but unhappiness to look forward to.

"Come, wipe your eyes," he said, becoming affectionate once more. "Is it possible that you, who were never nervous, can conjure up chimeras, and worry yourself in this way? Dash it all, we shall get out of our difficulties! First of all, you know that it was through you that I found the subject for my picture. There can not be much of a curse upon you, since you bring luck."

He laughed, and she shook her head, seeing well enough that he wanted to make her smile. She was suffering on account of his picture already; for, on the bridge, he had completely forgotten her, as if she had ceased to belong to him! and, since the night before, she had realized that he was farther and farther removed from her, in a world to which she could not ascend. But she allowed him to soothe her, and they exchanged one of their kisses of yore, before rising from the table to retire to rest.

Little Jacques had heard nothing. Benumbed by his stillness, he had fallen asleep, with his cheek on his picture-book; and the disproportionately large head of this defective offspring of genius, so heavy at times that it bent his neck, looked pale in the lamplight.

When his mother put him to bed he did not even open his eyes.

It was only at that period that Claude had the idea of marrying Christine. Though yielding to the advice of Sandoz, who expressed his surprise at the prolongation of this irregular situation, not justified by circumstances, he especially gave way to a feeling of pity, to a desire to show himself kind to her, and to win forgiveness for his delinquencies. He had seen her so sad of late, so uneasy at the future, that he did not know how to revive her spirits. He himself was growing sour, and relapsed into his former fits of anger, treating her, at times, like a servant, to whom one flings a week's notice. Being his lawful wife, she would, no doubt, feel herself more in her rightful home, and would suffer less from his rough behavior. She herself, for that matter, had never again spoken of marriage. She seemed to care nothing for earthly things, but entirely reposed upon him; however, he understood well enough that it grieved her not to be able to visit at Sandoz's; and, besides, they no longer lived amid the freedom and solitude of the country; they were in Paris, with its thousand and one petty spites of the neighbors, enforced relations, everything that is calculated to wound a woman. In reality, he had nothing against marriage save his old prejudices, those of an artist taking life as he lists. As he was never to leave her, why not afford her this pleasure? And, in fact, when he spoke to her about it, she gave a loud cry and threw her arms round his neck, surprised at experiencing so great an emotion. During a whole week, it made her feel thoroughly happy. Then her joy subsided long before the ceremony.

Moreover, Claude did not hurry with any of the formalities, and they had to wait a long while for the necessary papers. He continued getting the sketches for his picture together, and she, like himself, did not

seem in the least impatient. What was the good! It would assuredly make no difference in their life. They had decided to be married merely at the municipal offices, not in view of displaying any contempt for religion, but to get the affair over quickly and simply. It would suffice. The question of witnesses embarrassed them for a moment. As she was absolutely unacquainted with any one, he selected Sandoz and Mahoudeau for her. For a moment, he had thought of replacing the latter by Dubuche, but he never saw the architect now, and he feared to compromise him. He, Claude, would be content with Jory and Gagnière. In that way the affair would pass off among friends, and no one would talk of it.

Several weeks had gone by; they were in December, and the weather was terribly cold. On the day before the wedding, although they had barely thirty-five francs left them, they agreed that they could not send their witnesses away with a mere shake of the hand, and rather than have a lot of trouble in the studio, they decided to offer them breakfast at a small restaurant on the Boulevard de Clichy, after which they would each go home.

In the morning, while Christine was tacking a collar to a gray linsey gown, which, with the coquetry of woman, she had made for the occasion, Claude, already wearing his frock-coat and kicking his heels impatiently, had the idea of going to fetch Mahoudeau on the pretext that the latter was quite capable of forgetting all about the appointment. Since autumn, the sculptor had been living at Montmartre, in a small studio in the Rue des Tilleuls. He had moved in consequence of a series of dramas that had upset him. First of all, he had been turned out of the fruiterer's shop in the Rue du Cherche-Midi for not paying the rent; then there had been a definite rupture with Chaîne, who, in despair of not being able

to live by his brush, had rushed into a commercial speculation; repairing to all the fairs round about Paris as the manager of a kind of "fortune's wheel," belonging to a widow; last of all, had come the sudden flight of Mathilde, and the herbalist's business closed out. So now Mahoudeau lived all by himself in greater poverty than before, only eating when he secured the job of scraping some architectural ornaments, or of preparing the work of a more prosperous fellow-sculptor.

"I am going to fetch him, do you hear?" repeated Claude to Christine. "We still have a couple of hours before us. And, if the others come, make them wait. We'll go to the municipal offices altogether."

Once outside, Claude hurried along in the nipping cold that loaded his moustache with icicles. Mahoudeau's studio was at the end of a conglomeration of tenements—"rents," so to say—and he had to cross a number of small gardens, white with rime frost, and having the bleak, stiff sadness of cemeteries. He could distinguish the place from afar on account of the colossal plaster statue of the "Vintaging Girl," the former successful exhibit of the Salon, for which there had not been space on the narrow ground-floor. It was rotting away out there like a lot of rubbish shot from a cart, a lamentable picture, weather-bitten, its features riddled by the large, grimy tears of the rain. The key was in the door, so Claude went in.

"Hallo! you have come to fetch me," said Mahoudeau, surprised. "I've only got my hat to put on. But wait a bit, I was asking myself whether it wouldn't be better to light a little fire. I am uneasy about my woman there."

Some water in a bucket was ice-bound. It froze as hard inside the studio as out of doors, for, having been penniless for a week, he had eked out a little coal remaining to him, only lighting the stove for an

hour or two of a morning. This studio was a kind of tragic cavern, compared with which the shop of former days evoked reminiscences of snug comfort, so tomb-like a chill did the creviced ceiling and the bare walls exude. In the corners of the room, some other statues, of less bulky dimensions, plaster figures which had been modelled with passion and exhibited, and which had then come back there for want of buyers, seemed to be shivering with their noses turned to the wall, forming a melancholy row of cripples, some of them already damaged, showing mere stumps of arms, and all dust-begrimed, clay-bespattered; and under the eyes of the artist who had given them his heart's blood these wretched things dragged out years of agony, preserved at first with jealous care, despite the want of room, and then lapsing into the grotesque horror of all lifeless things, until the day when, taking up a mallet, he himself finished them off, crushing them into mere lumps of plaster, so as to be rid of them.

"You say we have got two hours, eh?" resumed Mahoudeau. "Well, I'll just light a bit of fire; it will be the wiser, perhaps."

Then while lighting the stove, he began bewailing his fate in an angry voice. What a dog's life a sculptor's was! The most bungling stonemason was better off. A figure, which the Government bought for three thousand francs, cost well nigh two thousand with its model, clay, marble or bronze, all sorts of expenses, and for all that it remained buried in some administrative cellar on the pretext that there was no room for it. The niches of the public buildings remained empty, pedestals were awaiting statues in the public gardens. Never mind, there was never any room! And there were no possible commissions from private people, at best a few busts, and at very rare intervals a memorial statue, subscribed for by the public and hurriedly executed at reduced terms. Sculp-

ture was the noblest of arts, the most manly, yes, but the one which led the most surely to death by starvation.

"Is your machine progressing?" asked Claude.

"Without this confounded cold, it would be finished," answered Mahoudeau. "I'll show it you."

He rose from his knees after listening to the snorting of the stove. In the middle of the studio, on a packing-case, strengthened by cross-pieces, stood a statue swathed in linen wraps which were frozen hard, with folds of inductile rigidity, and which draped the figure with the whiteness of a shroud. It was his old dream at last, not realized until now from want of means—an upright figure, the girl bathing, of which more than a dozen small models had been knocking about his place for years. In a moment, impatient of revolt, he had himself manufactured trusses and stays out of broom-handles, dispensing with the necessary iron-work in the hope that the wood would prove sufficiently solid. From time to time he shook the figure to try it; but it had not budged as yet.

"The devil!" he muttered; "some warmth will do her good. The wraps seem glued on to her—a regular breastplate."

The linen was crackling between his fingers, and breaking into splinters of ice. He was obliged to wait until the heat had thawed it a bit, and then with great care he stripped the figure, baring the head first, then the bosom, then the hips, pleased to find everything intact, and smiling like a lover at a woman fondly adored.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

Claude, who had only previously seen a little rough model of it, nodded his head, in order not to have to answer at once. Decidedly this good Mahoudeau was turning traitor, and drifting towards gracefulness, in spite of himself, with the pretty things that sprang

from under his big fingers, former stone-cutter that he was. Since his colossal "Vintaging Girl," he had gone on reducing and reducing his productions without appearing to be aware of it himself, always ready to stick out ferociously for the gigantic, which agreed with his temperament, but yielding to the partiality of his eyes for sweetness and gracefulness. The gigantic bosoms became girlish; the thighs elongated into elegant spindles; it was real nature that broke at last through inflated ambition. Exaggerated still, his "Girl Bathing" was already possessed of great charm, with her quivering shoulders, her tightly-crossed arms.

"Well, you don't like it?" he asked, looking annoyed.

"Oh, yes! I do. I think you are right to tone down a bit, seeing that you feel like it. You'll have a great success with this. Yes, it's evident it will please people very much."

Mahoudeau, whom such praises would once have thrown into consternation, seemed delighted. He explained that he wished to conquer public opinion without relinquishing a tithe of his convictions.

"Ah! dash it! it takes a weight off my mind to find you pleased, for I should have destroyed it if you had told me to do so, I give you my word! Another fortnight's work, and I'll sell my skin to no matter whom in order to pay the moulder. I say, I shall have a fine show at the Salon, perhaps get a medal."

He laughed, waved his arms about, and then breaking off:

"As we are not in a hurry, sit down a bit. I'm waiting for the wraps to become quite thawed."

The stove was beginning to get red hot, diffusing great heat. The figure, placed close by, seemed to revive under the warm breath that now crept upward along her spine from the shins to the nape. And the two friends who were now seated continued looking

the figure full in the face, chatting about it, noting each detail, pausing to examine each part of the body. The sculptor especially was growing excited in his delight, and from afar made a gesture of caressing his work.

At that moment Claude, who was looking at the figure, fancied that he experienced some hallucination. The figure was moving; a quiver like the ripple of a wavelet had crossed her, the left hip had become straightened, as it were, as if the right leg were about to step out.

"And the smooth surface," Mahoudeau went on, without noticing anything. "Ah, my boy, I took great pains over that! The skin thereabouts is like satin, old man."

By degrees the whole statue was becoming animated. And suddenly the head drooped forward, and the figure fell like a living being with the wild anguish, the grief-inspired spring of a woman flinging herself down.

Claude understood at last, when Mahoudeau uttered a terrible cry.

"By heavens, it's breaking to pieces; she is coming down!"

The clay, in thawing, had snapped the wood of the trusses which had lacked strength. There came a noise of cracking, you seemed to hear bones splitting. And Mahoudeau, with the same passionate gesture with which he had caressed the figure from afar, working himself into a fever, opened both his arms, at the risk of being killed beneath it. For a moment it swayed to and fro, and then came down with one crash on its face, broken in twain at the ankles, leaving its feet sticking to the boards.

Claude had jumped up to hold him back.

"Dash it! you'll be smashed!"

But dreading to see it finish itself off on the floor, Mahoudeau remained with hands outstretched. And

the girl seemed to fling herself on his neck. He caught her in his arms, winding them tightly round this huge figure, which seemed animated as in the first awakening of the flesh. The shock was so violent that he was carried off his legs and thrown over, as far back as the wall; and, without relaxing his hold on the girl's trunk, he remained as if stunned, lying beside her.

"Ah! confound it!" repeated Claude, furiously, believing that his friend was dead.

With great difficulty Mahoudeau rose to his knees, and burst into violent sobs. He had only damaged his face in the fall. Some blood dribbled along one of his cheeks, mingling with his tears.

"Ah! curse poverty!" he said. "It's enough to make a fellow drown himself not to be able to buy a couple of rods. And there she is, there she is."

His sobs grew louder; they became an agonizing wail, the painful shrieking of a lover before the mutilated corpse of his affections. With unsteady hands he touched the limbs lying in confusion around him; the head, the torso, the arms that had snapped in twain; above aught else the bosom, now caved in; this bosom, flattened, as if it had been operated upon for some terrible disease, suffocated him, and he unceasingly returned to it, probing the sore, trying to find the gash by which life had fled, and his tears, which were mingled with blood, flowed freely, staining the statue's wounds with red.

"Do help me," he gasped. "One can't leave her like this."

Claude was overcome also, and his own eyes grew moist from a feeling of artistic fraternity. He hastened to his comrade's side, but the sculptor, after having claimed his assistance, persisted in picking up the remains by himself, as if dreading the rough handling of any one else. He slowly crawled about on his

knees, took up the fragments one by one, laid them down and put them together on a board. The figure soon lay there in its entirety, like one of those girls who, committing suicide from love, are shattered by falling from the top of some monument, and are put together again, looking both grotesque and lamentable, to be transported to the Morgue. Mahoudeau, seated on the floor before his figure, did not take his eyes from it, but became absorbed in this heart-rending contemplation. However, his sobs subsided, and at last he said, with a long-drawn sigh: "I'll model her lying down! There's no other way! Ah, my poor old woman, I had such trouble to set her on her legs, and I thought her so grand like that."

But all at once Claude grew uneasy. What about his wedding? Mahoudeau must change his clothes. As he had no other frock-coat than the one he was wearing, he was obliged to make a jacket do. Then when the figure was covered once more with linen wraps, like a corpse, over which a sheet has been pulled up, they both started off at a run. The stove was roaring away, the thaw filled the whole studio with water, and the old dust-begrimed plaster casts were streaming with flush.

When they reached the Rue de Douai there was no one there but little Jacques, in charge of the door-keeper. Christine, tired of waiting, had just started off with the three others, thinking that there had been some mistake; that Claude might have told her that he would go straight to the municipal offices with Mahoudeau. The pair fell into a sharp trot, but only overtook Christine and the comrades in the Rue Drouot in front of the municipal edifice. They all went upstairs together, and met with a very cool reception from the usher on duty, on account of their being late. The wedding was got over in a few minutes, in a perfectly empty room. The mayor mumbled on, and the

bride and bridegroom uttered the binding "Yes" in a curt voice, while their witnesses were marvelling at the bad taste of the appointments of the room. Once outside, Claude took Christine's arm again, and that was all.

It was pleasant walking in the clear frosty weather. The party quietly walked back on foot, and climbed the Rue des Martyrs to reach the restaurant on the Boulevard de Clichy. A small private room had been engaged; the breakfast was a very cordial affair, and not a word was said about the simple formality that had just been gone through; other subjects were spoken of all the while, like at one of their customary friendly gatherings.

It was thus that Christine, very affected in reality despite her pretended indifference, heard her husband and his friends excite themselves for three mortal hours about Mahoudeau's statue. Since the others had been made acquainted with the story, they kept harping on every particular. Sandoz thought the whole thing very wonderful; Jory and Gagnière discussed the strength of stays and trusses; the former mainly concerned about the monetary loss involved, the other demonstrating with a chair that the statue might have been kept up. As for Mahoudeau, still very shaky, and growing dazed, he complained of a stiffness which he had not felt before; his limbs began to hurt him, he had strained his muscles and bruised his skin as if he had been caught in the embrace of a stone siren. Christine washed the scratch on his cheek, which had begun to bleed again, and it seemed to her that this statue of the mutilated woman was sitting down at table with them, that it was she alone who was of any importance that day; that she alone excited Claude, whose narrative, repeated a score of times, was full of endless particulars about the emo-

tion he had felt on seeing that piece of clay shattered at his feet.

However, at the dessert there was a diversion, for Gagnière all at once said to Jory:

"By the way, I saw you with Mathilde the day before yesterday. Yes, yes, in the Rue Dauphine."

Jory, who had turned very red, tried to deny it, but his nose quivered, his mouth became contracted, and he began to snigger stupidly.

"Oh, a mere accidental meeting—honor bright! I don't know where she hangs out, or I should have told you."

"What! is it you who are hiding her?" exclaimed Mahoudeau. "Well, you may keep her. Nobody wants to have her back again."

The truth was that Jory, throwing to the winds all his habits of prudence and parsimony, had cloistered Mathilde in a small room.

"After all, every man takes his pleasures where he finds them," said Sandoz, full of philosophical tolerance.

"That's true enough," replied the other quietly, lighting a cigar.

They still lingered at table, and night was falling when they saw Mahoudeau, who wanted to go to bed, to his own door. And Claude and Christine, on reaching home, after taking Jacques from the doorkeeper, found the studio quite chilly, wrapped in such dense gloom that they had to grope about for several minutes before they were able to light the lamp. They had also to light the stove again, and it struck seven o'clock before they were able to draw breath at their ease. They were not hungry, so they merely finished the remains of some boiled beef, mainly by way of encouraging the child to eat his soup; and when they had put him to bed, they settled themselves with the lamp betwixt them, as was their habit every evening.

However, Christine had not put out any work, she felt too moved to sew. She sat there, her hands resting idly on the table, looking at Claude, who on his side had at once become absorbed in a sketch, a bit of his picture, some workmen of the Port Saint Nicolas, unloading plaster. An invincible dreaminess came over her, recollections and regrets passed through the depths of her expressionless eyes; and by degrees a growing sadness, a great mute grief seemingly took possession of her, amid this indifference, this boundless solitude into which she was drifting, although so near to him. True, he was always there, on the other side of the table, but how far away she felt him to be; he was yonder before that point of the Cité, and still farther in the infinite inaccessible regions of art; so far, indeed, that she would now never be able to join him! She had several times tried to start a conversation, but without eliciting any answer from him. The hours went by, she grew weary and numb with doing nothing, and she ended by taking out her purse and counting her money.

"Do you know how much we have to start on our married life with?"

Claude did not even raise his head.

"We've nine sous. Ah! talk of poverty!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and finally growled: "We shall be rich some day; don't you fret."

And the silence was renewed, she did not even attempt to break it, but gazed at her nine coppers laid in a row upon the table. It struck midnight; she shivered, sick with waiting and cold.

"Let's retire, dear," she murmured; "I am dead tired."

He was working away like mad; and did not even hear her.

"I say, the fire's gone out; we shall make ourselves ill."

The imploring voice penetrated him at last, and made him start with sudden exasperation.

"Well, go to bed if you like! You can see very well that I want to finish something!"

She remained there for another minute, amazed by this sudden anger, her face twitching with sorrow. Then, feeling that he would rather be without her, that the very presence of a woman doing nothing turned him out of his mind, she rose from the table and went to bed, leaving the door wide open. Half-an-hour, three-quarters went by, nothing stirred, not a sound came from her room; but she was not asleep, she had merely stretched herself on her back, her eyes staring into the gloom; and she timidly ventured upon a last appeal, from the depths of the dark alcove.

"My dear, I am waiting for you. Come, dear."

She only got an oath in reply. And nothing stirred after that; she had, perhaps, dozed off. The icy chill in the studio grew more intense; the wick of the lamp was carbonizing and burning red, while he, bending over his sketch, did not seem to be conscious of the slowly passing minutes.

At two o'clock, however, he rose up, furious at the lamp going out for lack of oil. He only had time to take it into the other room, so as not to have to undress in the dark. But his displeasure still further increased on seeing Christine stretched on her back, her eyes wide open.

"What! you are not asleep?"

"No, I don't feel sleepy."

"Oh! I know that's a reproach. I have told you a hundred times how it vexes me to have you lay awake for me."

She was choking. She sobbed violently.

"Come, what's the matter with you? I've said nothing to you. Come, darling, what's the matter?

Come, darling; we don't know each other merely since yesterday. Yes, yes, you had arranged it all in your little mind. You wanted to be a bride, didn't you? Come, don't cry any more. You know very well that I'm not evil-hearted."

Never more would they be all in all to each other; something irreparable had taken place, something had snapped, there was a void between them. This formality of marriage seemed to have killed love.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE DEAD CHILD."

AS Claude could not paint his huge picture in the small studio of the Rue de Douai, he made up his mind to rent some shed, that would be spacious enough, elsewhere; and strolling one day on the heights of Montmartre, he found his affair half way down the slope of the Rue Tourlaque, the street that descends abruptly behind the cemetery, and whence you overlook Clichy as far as the marshes of Gennevilliers. It was the old drying shed of a dyer, a shanty fifteen mètres long by ten wide, the boards and plaster of which were open to the winds from the four points of the compass. It was let to him for three hundred francs. Summer was at hand; he would soon work off his picture and then give notice.

This settled, feverish with work and hope, he decided to go to all the necessary expenses; as fortune was certain to come in the end, why trammel its advent by unnecessary scruples? Taking advantage of his right, he broke in upon the principal of his income, and soon grew accustomed to spend money without counting. At first he kept the thing from Christine, for she had already twice stopped him from doing so; and when he was at last obliged to tell her, she also, after a week of reproaches and apprehension, fell in with it, happy at the comfort in which she lived, and yielding to the pleasure of always having some money in her purse. Then came a few years of cosy abandonment.

Claude soon became altogether absorbed in his picture. He had furnished the vast studio in a very summary style: a few chairs, the old couch from the Quai de Bourbon, a deal table bought for five francs, second-hand. In the practice of his art he was entirely devoid of that vanity which delights in luxurious surroundings. The only real expense he went to was that of buying some steps on casters, with a platform and a movable footboard. After that he busied himself about his canvas, which he wished to be eight mètres in length and five in height. He insisted upon preparing it himself; ordered the framework and bought the seamless canvas, which he and a couple of friends had all the work in the world to stretch properly by means of pincers. He merely coated it with ceruse, laid on with a palette knife, refusing to size it previously, in order that it might remain absorbent, by which plan he declared that the painting would be bright and solid. An easel was not to be thought of. It would not have been possible to manœuvre a canvas of such dimensions on it. So he invented a system of ropes and beams, which held it against the wall in a slightly slanting position, in a cheerful light. And backwards and forwards in front of the vast white surface, there rolled the steps looking like a perfect edifice, like the scaffolding of a cathedral in front of the work to be executed.

But when everything was ready, Claude once more began to have misgivings. The idea that he had perhaps not chosen the proper light in which to paint his picture fidgeted him. Perhaps an early morning effect would have been better? Perhaps he ought to have chosen a dull day, and so he went back to the Pont des Saint-Pères, and lived there for another three months.

The Cité rose up before him, between the two arms

of the river, at all hours and in all weather. After a late fall of snow he beheld it wrapped in ermine, and standing out above the mud-colored water, against a light slatey sky. On the first sunshiny days he beheld it cleanse itself of everything wintry and acquire renewed infancy, as it were, with the sprouting verdure of the lofty trees on the low ground below the bridge. He beheld it on a somewhat misty day recede to a distance and evaporate, delicate and quivering, like a fairy palace. Then, again, there were pelting rains, which submerged and hid it behind the immense curtain drawn from the sky to the earth; storms, with lightning flashes which gave it a tawny hue, and lent it the opaque light of some cut-throat place half destroyed by the fall of huge copper-colored clouds; winds that swept over it tempestuously, sharpening its angles and showing it, hard, bare and beaten against the pale blue sky. Then, again, when the sunbeams broke into dust amidst the vapors of the Seine, it appeared immersed in the depths of the diffused brightness, without a shadow about it, lighted up equally on all sides and looking charmingly delicate, like a cut gem set in fine gold. He insisted on beholding it when the sun was rising, piercing through the morning mists, when the Quai de l'Horloge flushes and the Quai des Orfèvres remains wrapt in gloom; when up in the pink sky it is already full of life with the bright awakening of its towers and spires, while night, similar to a drooping cloak, slowly slides down from its buildings. He beheld it also at mid-day, with the sun poised vertically above it, when it is corroded, as it were, by a crude glare, when it becomes discolored and mute like a dead city, retaining nothing of life but its heat, the quiver of its distant housetops. He beheld it, moreover, beneath the setting sun, abandoning itself to the night slowly uprising from the river, with the salient edges of its monuments still fringed

with a glow like that of fuel about to be extinguished, with final conflagrations rekindled in its windows, its frontages pierced with holes by the sudden flaring up of glass panes which launched forth tongue-like flashes. But in presence of these twenty different aspects of the Cité, no matter what the hour or the weather was, he ever came back to the Cité he had seen for the first time, at about four o'clock one fine September afternoon, that Cité so calm in the gentle breeze, that heart of Paris beating in the limpid atmosphere, and seemingly enlarged by the vast stretch of sky which a flight of cloudlets was crossing.

Claude spent his time there under the Pont des Saints-Pères. He had made it his shelter, his home, his roof. The constant din of the vehicles, similar to the distant rumbling of thunder, no longer disturbed him. Settling himself against the first abutment, beneath the huge iron arches, he took sketches, and painted studies. The employés of the river navigation service, the offices of which were hard by, got to know him, and, indeed, the wife of an inspector, who lived in a sort of tarred cabin with her husband, two children and a cat, kept his canvases for him, to save him the trouble of carrying them to and fro each day. It became his joy, this secluded nook beneath Paris, which rumbled in the air, and whose ardent life he felt rolling overhead. He, at first, became passionately interested in the Port St. Nicolas, with its ceaseless bustle like that of a distant genuine seaport. The steam crane, "The Sophia," manœuvred, hauling up blocks of stone; tumbrels arrived to fetch loads of sand; men and horses pulled, panting for breath on the large paving stones, which sloped down as far as the water, to the granite margin, along which a double row of lighters and barges was moored. For weeks Claude had worked hard at a study of some lightermen unloading a cargo of plaster,

carrying the white sacks on their shoulders, leaving a white path behind them, bepowdered with white themselves, whilst hard by, another barge, unladen of its cargo of coal, had stained the bank with a huge inky blot. Then he sketched the profile of a swimming-bath on the left bank, together with a floating wash-house, somewhat in the rear; the windows open, the washerwomen in a row, kneeling down on a level with the stream, beating their dirty linen. In the middle of the river, he had studied a boat which a waterman sculled over the stern; then, farther behind, a steamer of the towing service straining its chain, and dragging a series of rafts, loaded with barrels and boards, up the stream. The principal backgrounds had been sketched a long while ago, still he did several bits over again—the two arms of the Seine, a sky all by itself, in which uprose only towers and spires gilded by the sun. And under the hospitable bridge, in that nook as secluded as some far-off cleft of a rock, he was rarely disturbed by any one. The anglers passed by with contemptuous unconcern. His only companion was the overseer's cat, cleaning herself in the sunlight, at peace beneath the tumult of the world overhead.

At last Claude had all his documents. In a few days he threw off an outline sketch of the whole, and the great work was begun. However, the first battle between himself and his huge canvas raged in the Rue Tourlaque right through the summer; for he had obstinately insisted upon personally attending to the technical calculation of his composition, and he failed to manage it, getting into constant muddles about the slightest deviation in the mathematical plan, of which he had no experience. It made him indignant with himself. So he let it go, deciding to make what corrections might be necessary afterwards. He covered his canvas with a rush—in such a fever as to live

for whole days on his steps, brandishing enormous brushes, and expending as much muscular force as if anxious to move mountains. And when evening came he reeled about like drunk, fell asleep when he had swallowed his last mouthful of food, used up completely; and his wife had to put him to bed like a child. From this heroic labor sprang a masterly sketch—one of those sketches ablaze with genius amidst the somewhat chaotic mass of color. Bongrand, who came to look at it, caught the painter in his powerful arms, and stifled him with kisses, his eyes blinded with tears. Sandoz, in his enthusiasm, gave a dinner; the others, Jory, Mahoudeau and Gagnière, again went about announcing a masterpiece; as for Fagerolles, he remained motionless for a moment or so, then burst into congratulations, pronouncing it too beautiful.

And, in fact, as if the irony of the successful trickster had brought him bad luck, Claude subsequently only spoilt his sketch. It was the old story over again. He spent himself in one effort, in a magnificent spring, after which he failed to bring out the rest; he did not know how to finish. He fell into his former impotence; he lived for two years engaged on this picture only, having no feeling for anything else; at times in a seventh heaven of exurberant joy; at others flung to earth, so wretched, so distracted by doubt, that dying men gasping in their beds in a hospital were happier than he was. Twice already he had failed to be ready for the Salon, for always, at the last moment, when he hoped to have finished in a few sittings, he found some void; he felt his composition crack and crumble to pieces beneath his fingers. When the third Salon drew nigh, he had a terrible crisis; he remained for a fortnight without going to his studio in the Rue Tourlaque, and when he did return to it, it was as when one returns into a house desolated by

death. He turned the huge canvas to the wall, rolled his steps into a corner; he would have smashed and burned everything if his faltering hands had found strength enough. Nothing more existed; a blast of anger had swept the floor clean; he spoke of setting to work at small things, as he was incapable of perfecting paintings of any size.

In spite of himself, his first idea of a picture on a small scale took him back to the Cité. Why should not he paint a simple view, on a moderate size canvas? But a kind of shame, mingled with a strange jealousy, prevented him from settling himself in his old spot under the Pont des Saints-Pères. It seemed to him as if that spot were sacred now; that he ought not to offer any outrage to his great work, dead as it was. And he stationed himself at the end of the bank, above the bridge. This time, at any rate, he would work directly from nature; he felt happy at not having to resort to trickery, as was unavoidable with works of inordinate size. The small picture, very carefully painted, more highly finished than usual, met, however, with the same fate as the others before the hanging committee, who were indignant with this style of painting executed with a tipsy brush, as was said at the time in the studios. The slap in the face was all the more severe, as a report had spread of concessions, of advances to the School of Arts, in order to be received. And when the picture came back to him, the painter, deeply wounded, weeping with rage, tore it into narrow shreds, which he burned in his stove. It was not sufficient to kill that one with a knife thrust, it must be annihilated.

Another year went by for Claude in desultory toil. He worked from habit, but finished nothing; he himself saying, with a painful laugh, that he had lost himself, and was trying to find himself again. In reality the tenacious consciousness of his genius left

him a hope not to be destroyed, and this even during the longest crises of despondency. He suffered like some one damned, forever rolling along the rock which slipped back again and crushed him; but the future remained to him, the certainty of seizing that rock one day in his powerful arms and of flinging it upward to the stars. His friends at last beheld his eyes light up with passion once more. It was known that he again secluded himself in the Rue Tourlaque. He who formerly had always been carried beyond the work on which he was engaged, by the spreading dream of the picture to come, now stood at bay before this subject of the Cité. It had become his fixed idea—the bar that closed up his life. And soon he began to speak freely of it again in a new blaze of enthusiasm, exclaiming, with childish delight, that he had found his way and that he felt certain of victory.

One day Claude, who, so far, had not re-opened his door, condescended to admit Sandoz. The latter tumbled upon a study with a deal of dash in it, thrown off without a model, and again very admirable in color. Besides, the subject had remained the same—the Port St. Nicolas to the left, the swimming-baths to the right, the Seine and the Cité in the background. But he was amazed at perceiving, instead of the boat sculled by the waterman, another very large skiff taking up the whole centre of the composition, and occupied by three women; one in a bathing costume was rowing; another was seated over the edge with her feet in the water, her costume, half unfastened, showing her bare shoulder; while the third stood erect at the prow, with so bright a tint that she irradiated like the sun.

"Hallo! what an idea!" muttered Sandoz. "What are those women doing there?"

"Why, they are bathing," Claude answered quietly. "Don't you see that they have come out of the

swimming-baths; it supplies me with a motive; it's a real find, eh? Does it shock you?"

His old friend, who knew him well by now, dreaded to give him cause for discouragement.

"I, oh! no! Only I am afraid that the public will again fail to understand. That woman in the very midst of Paris—it's improbable."

Claude looked naively surprised.

"Ah! you think so. Well, so much the worse. What's the odds, as long as the woman is well painted? Besides, I need something like that to get my courage up."

On the following occasions, Sandoz gently reverted to the strangeness of the composition, pleading, as was his nature, the cause of outraged logic. How could a modern painter who prided himself on painting merely what was real—how could he strain his work by introducing such fanciful things into it? It would have been so easy to choose another subject, in which such things would have been necessary. But Claude became obstinate, resorted to lame and violent explanations, for he would not avow the real reason; an idea of his own so wanting in lucidness that he would have been at a loss to express it clearly, the longing for some secret symbolism; the old recrudescence of romanticism which made him see the incarnation of the very flesh of Paris in this oddity, the city impassioned, resplendent with the beauty of woman.

Before the pressing objections of his friend he pretended to be shaken in his resolution.

After that he never reverted to the subject again, remaining silently obstinate, merely shrugging his shoulders and smiling with embarrassment when some allusion betrayed the general astonishment at the sight of this Venus emerging triumphantly from the froth of the Seine amidst the omnibuses on the quays and the lightermen of the Port St. Nicolas.

Spring had come round again, Claude was once more setting to work at his large picture, when a decision—arrived at in a moment of prudence—changed the daily life of the household. At times Christine could not help getting uneasy at all this money so quickly spent—sums which constantly diminished the capital. Since the supply had seemed inexhaustible, they no longer counted. Then, at the end of four years, they had woke up one morning frightened, when, on asking for their account, they found that barely three thousand francs were left out of the twenty thousand. They immediately fell into a reaction of severe economy, stinting themselves about their bread, planning the cutting down of the barest necessities; and it was thus that, in the first impulse of self-sacrifice, they left the Rue de Douai. What was the use of having two rents to pay? There was room enough in the old drying-shed in the Rue de Tourlaque—still stained with the dyes of former days—to afford accommodation to three people. Their settlement there was, nevertheless, a laborious affair; for this gallery, fifteen mètres long by ten broad, provided them, after all, with but one room; it was like a gipsy's shed, where everything had to be done in common. As the landlord was unwilling, the painter himself had to divide it at one end by a boarded partition, behind which he devised a kitchen and a bedroom. They were delighted with it, despite the chinks in the roof, through which the wind blew, and although they were obliged on rainy days to set basins beneath the broader cracks. The place looked mournfully bare. They themselves pretended to be proud at being lodged so spaciously; they told their friends that little Jacques would at least have room to run about. Poor Jacques, in spite of his nine years, did not grow apace; only his head seemed to become larger. They could not send him to school for more than a week at a stretch, for he came back absolutely

dazed, ill with having tried to learn, so that they nearly always allowed him to live on all fours around them, crawling about from one corner to another.

Christine, who for a long while had had no share in Claude's daily work, found herself once more beside him through every hour of his long spells of toil. She helped him to scrape and pumice the old canvas; she gave him some advice about attaching it more securely to the wall. But they found that another disaster had befallen them—the steps had become warped in the constant damp from the roof, and, for fear of an accident, he was obliged to strengthen them by an oak cross-piece, while she handed him the nails one by one. Once more, and for the second time, everything was ready. She watched him mathematically outlining his sketch once more, standing behind him, till she felt faint with fatigue, and finally dropping to the floor, where she remained squatting, and still looking at him.

Ah! how she would have liked to snatch him from this painting which had seized hold of him. It was for that she made herself his servant, only too happy to lower herself to laborer's toil. Since she shared his work again, the three of them, he, she and the canvas side by side, her hope revived. If he had escaped her when, all alone, she cried her eyes out in the Rue de Douai, if he had lingered till late in the Rue de Tourlaque, fascinated and exhausted, perhaps, now that she was there, she might regain her hold over him. Ah, that painting business, with what jealous hatred she hated it! It was no longer the revolt of the middle-class girl, who painted in water colors, against this independent, brutal, magnificent art. No, little by little, she had come to understand it, drawn towards it at first by her love for the painter, gained over afterwards by the feast of light, by the original charm of the bright tints. By now she had

accepted everything, lilac-tinted soil and blue trees. Indeed, a kind of respect made her quiver before these works that had seemed so horrid to her at first. She beheld their power well enough, and treated them like rivals of which one could no longer joke. But her vindictiveness grew in proportion to her admiration; she revolted at having to stand by and witness this diminution of herself.

At first it was a silent struggle of every minute. She obtruded herself, and at each moment interposed whatever she could of her own self, a hand, a shoulder, between the painter and his picture. She always remained there, enwrapping him with her breath, reminding him that he was hers. Then her old idea revived—she also would paint; she would join him in the very depths of his art fever. During a whole month she put on a blouse, and worked like a pupil by the side of a master, docilely copying one of his sketches, and she only gave in when she found the effort turn against her object; for he finished by forgetting that she was a woman, as if deceived by their working conjointly, on a footing of simple comradeship as between man and man. Accordingly she resorted to what was her only strength.

To set some of the small figures of his latter pictures on their legs Claude had many a time already taken the hint of a head, the pose of an arm, the attitude of a whole body from Christine. He threw a cloak on her shoulders, and caught her in the movement he wanted, shouting to her not to stir. These were services which she showed herself only too pleased to render him.

However, since Claude had broadly outlined the large, upright female figure which was to occupy the centre of his picture, Christine looked at the vague silhouette in a dreamy way, worried by an ever obtruding thought

before which her scruples vanished one by one. And so when he spoke of taking a model, she offered herself.

"What! you? But you get in a passion when I ask you for as much as the tip of your nose."

She smiled, embarrassed.

"Oh! the tip of my nose! As if I didn't pose for your figure in the 'Open Air' subject long ago. A model will cost you seven francs a sitting. We are not so rich, we may as well save the money."

The question of economy decided him at once.

"I'm agreeable, and it's even very nice of you to have this courage, for you know that it is not a bit of idle pastime to sit for me. Never mind, you had better confess to it, you big booby, you are afraid of another woman setting her feet in the place; you are jealous."

Jealous! Yes, indeed she was jealous, so jealous that she suffered agony. But she snapped her fingers at other women. She had but one rival, that painting he preferred which robbed her of him.

Claude, who was delighted at first, made a study, a simple academic study, in the attitude required for his picture. They waited until Jacques had gone to school; they locked themselves in, and the sitting lasted for hours. During the first days Christine suffered a great deal from being obliged to remain in the same position; then she grew used to it, not daring to complain, lest she might vex him, and keeping back her tears when he roughly pushed her about. And he soon acquired the habit of doing so, treating her like a mere model; more exacting with her, however, than if he had paid her, never afraid of unduly taxing her strength, as she was his wife. He employed her for everything, for an arm, for a foot, for the most trifling detail he stood in need of. He was simply lowering her, transforming her into a "living lay figure," which

he stuck in front of him and copied as he would have copied a pitcher or a stew-pan for a bit of still life.

This time Claude proceeded leisurely, and before roughing in the large figure he had already tired Christine for months by making her pose in twenty different ways in order "to thoroughly imbue himself," as he expressed it. At last, one day, he began the roughing in. It was an autumnal morning, the north wind was already sharp, and it was by no means warm inside the vast studio itself, although the stove was roaring. As little Jacques, poorly with one of his fits of painful torpor, had been unable to go to school, they had decided to lock him up in the room at the back, telling him to be very good. And, shivering from head to foot, the mother prepared herself, and settled herself near the stove, motionless, in the attitude required.

During the first hour, the painter, perched on his steps, gave her glances which seemed to slash her, but he did not speak a word. Unutterable sadness gradually stole over her, and she felt afraid of fainting, no longer knowing whether she was suffering from the cold or from a despair that had come from afar, and the bitterness of which she felt to be rising within her. Her fatigue became so great that she staggered and hobbled about.

"What, already?" cried Claude. "Why, you haven't been at it more than a quarter of an hour. You don't want to earn your seven francs, then?"

He was joking in a gruff voice, delighted with his work. And she had scarcely recovered the use of her limbs, beneath the dressing-gown she had wrapped round her, when he went on shouting:

"Come on, come on, no idling! It's a grand day, to-day is! I must either have some genius or else kick the bucket!"

Then when she had resumed her pose, in the wan

daylight, and when he had begun to paint again, he, continued from time to time to jerk out some sentence yielding to the need he experienced of making a noise whenever his work pleased him.

"It's very odd, you really absorb the light. For instance, this morning, one would scarcely believe it, you are altogether gray. And the other day you were altogether pink, oh! pink of such a shade that it seemed improbable. It's a nuisance, for one never knows—"

He stopped, blinking his eyes at her.

"The study is deuced fine after all. It sets a glow against the background. And it quivers, becomes instinct with life, as if one could see the blood flowing in the veins. Ah! a well-drawn muscle, solidly painted in full light, there's nothing finer, nothing better; it's a god. As for me, I have no other religion, I'd go down on my knees before such a thing for the whole of my life."

And as he was obliged to come down for a tube of color, he approached her.

Then, after climbing up the steps again, he shouted out in his feverish excitement:

"Dash it all! If I don't paint a masterpiece with you this time, I must be a pig!"

Christine kept silent, and her anguish increased in the certainty that was stealing over her. Motionless, beneath the brutality of fact, she felt the discomfort of her situation. The experiment had been made, what was the good of further hope? Ah! this was the end; she no longer existed as a woman; he no longer loved aught in her but his art, nature and life. And with her eyes gazing into space, she remained rigid like a statue, keeping down the tears with which her heart was swelling, not having even the wretched consolation of being able to cry.

A call came from the bed-room, while a pair of small fists tapped on the door:

"Mamma, mamma, I can't sleep, I want to play. Open the door, mamma."

It was Jacques, growing impatient. Claude became angry, growling that one never had a minute's peace.

"By-and-bye," shouted Christine. "Go to sleep. Your father wants to work."

But she seemed to get fidgety once more. She kept glancing at the door, and ended by relinquishing the pose for a moment so as to hang her petticoat on the key and thus cover the key-hole. Then, without saying a word, she again stationed herself near the stove, her head erect, her figure slightly thrown back, and her bosom swelling.

And the sitting seemed everlasting, hours and hours went by. There she stood, offering herself in her attitude of a bathing girl about to jump into the water, while he, perched on his ladder up in the clouds, only yearned for the other Christine he was painting. He had even left off speaking to her; she had simply become an object again, an object beautiful in color. He had done nothing but look at her since the morning, and yet she could not find a trace of herself in his eyes; she was a stranger henceforth, driven away from him.

At last he stopped with sheer fatigue; and he noticed that she was shivering.

"Hallo! do you feel cold?"

"Yes, a little."

"How funny! I'm burning hot. But I don't want you to catch cold. That'll do for to-day."

As he was getting down, she thought he was coming to kiss her. As a rule, and from a lingering sentiment of conjugal gallantry, he rewarded her with a hasty kiss for the fatigue of the sitting. But now, full of his work, he forgot even about that; kneeling down, he at once proceeded to wash his brushes which he dipped in a pot of soft soap. And she, waiting, remained erect, still hoping. A minute

passed by. He was astonished by this motionless shadow, looked at her in surprise, and then recommenced to rub away energetically. Thereupon, her hands shaking in her hurry, she dressed herself in the horrible confusion of a woman disdained.

But the very next morning she was bound to act as a model again in the chill atmosphere beneath the brutal light. Was it not her profession henceforth? How could she refuse now that it had become a habit? She would never have thought of causing Claude a moment's grief, and each day she experienced anew this defeat of her charms.

For months these sittings thus became Christine's daily torture. Their happy life together had ceased, there seemed to be three people in the place, as if he had introduced that woman he was painting after her. The vast picture rose up between them, divided them as with a wall, beyond which he lived with that other woman. This doubling of herself well nigh drove her mad with jealousy, and yet she felt the pettiness of her sufferings, and did not dare to avow them lest he should laugh at her. However, she did not deceive herself; she fully realized that he preferred her counterfeit to herself, that her image was the worshipped one, the sole preoccupation, the affection of his every hour. He killed her with sitting in order to enhance the beauty of the other; upon the other depended his joys and sorrows according as to whether he beheld her live or languish beneath his brush. Was not this love? And what a suffering to have to lend herself so that the other might be created, so that they might be haunted by a nightmare of this rival, so that the latter might forever be between them, more powerful than reality, in the studio, at meals, everywhere! So much dust, the veriest trifle, a patch of color on a canvas, a mere semblance destroying all their happiness—he, silent, indifferent, brutal at times—she,

tortured by his desertion, in despair at being unable to drive from her home this rival, who was so encroaching and so terrible in her iconic immobility!

And it was then that Christine, finding herself altogether beaten, felt all the sovereignty of art weigh down upon her. This painting, which she had already accepted without restriction, she raised it still higher in her estimation, placed it in the sanctuary of a fear-inspiring tabernacle before which she remained crushed, as before those powerful divinities of wrath, which one honors, in the excess of hatred and fear that they inspire. It was a holy awe, the certainty that struggling was henceforth useless, that she would be crushed like a bit of straw if she persisted in her obstinacy. The canvases became magnified in her eyes, the smallest of them assumed triumphal dimensions, the worst overwhelmed her with their victory, and she no longer judged them, but grovelled, trembling, thinking all of them formidable, and invariably replying to her husband's questions:

"Oh, yes; very good. Oh, superb! Oh, very, very extraordinary that one."

Nevertheless, she harbored no anger against him; she continued to worship him with a tearful tenderness, seeing him consume himself. After a few weeks of successful work, everything had become spoilt again; he could not finish his large female figure. It was for that reason that he killed his model with fatigue, keeping hard at work for days and days, then leaving the picture untouched for a whole month. The figure was begun anew, relinquished, done all over again at least a dozen times. One year, two years went by without the picture being completed, though sometimes almost finished, but scratched out the next morning to be painted entirely over again.

Ah! what an effort of art creation it was, an effort which cost him blood and tears, and made him agonize in his attempt to instil life. Ever battling with reality,

and ever beaten, it was the struggle with the Angel. He was killing himself in this impossible task of making one canvas hold all nature; he was exhausted at last by the constant pains which strained his muscles without his ever being able to bring his genius forth. What others were satisfied with, the more or less faithful rendering, the indispensable trickeries, worried him with remorse, made him as indignant as if resorting to such practices had been ignoble cowardice; and so he began over again, spoiled what was good through wanting to do better, finding that it didn't appeal to one, always dissatisfied with his women—so his friends jokingly expressed it—until they flung their arms round his neck. What was lacking in his power that he could not endow them with life? Very little, no doubt. Sometimes he went beyond the right point, sometimes he stopped short of it. One day the words, "incomplete genius," overheard behind his back, had flattered and frightened him. Yes, it must be that; he jumped too far or not far enough; he suffered from a want of nervous equilibrium; he was afflicted with the hereditary derangement which, because there were a few grains the more or the less of some substance in his brain, was making him a lunatic instead of a great man. When a fit of despair drove him from his studio, when he fled from his work, he now carried with him this idea of fatal impotence, and he heard it beating against his skull like the obstinate tolling of a funeral bell.

His life became wretched. Never had doubt of himself pursued him in that way before. He disappeared for whole days together; he even stopped out a whole night, coming back the next morning stupefied, without being able to say where he had been: it was thought he had been tramping through the outskirts of Paris rather than find himself face to face with his spoilt work. His sole relief was to fly off the moment his work filled him

with shame and hatred, and to remain away until he felt the courage to face it once more. And not even his wife dared to question him on his return, only too happy to see him back again after her anxious waiting. At such times he madly scoured Paris, especially the eccentric quarters, from a longing to debase himself and hob-nob with laborers; he expressed at every recurring crisis his old regret at not being some mason's hodman. Did not happiness consist in having solid limbs, in performing the work one was built for well and quickly? He had wrecked his life; he ought to have had himself engaged in the old times when he breakfasted at the "Dog of Montargis," Gomard's tavern, where he had had as a friend a Limousin, a big, strapping, merry fellow, whose brawny arms he envied. Then, when he came back to the Rue Tourlaque, with his legs giving way and his head empty, he gave his picture the distressful, frightened glance one casts at the dead in a mortuary-room, and this until fresh hope of resuscitating it, of endowing it with life brought a flush to his face once more.

One day Christine was posing, and the figure of the woman was again well nigh finished. For the last hour, however, Claude had been growing gloomy, losing the childish delight he had displayed at the beginning of the sitting. So Christine did not dare to breathe, realizing by her own discomfort that everything was going wrong once more, and afraid that she might accelerate the catastrophe if she moved as much as a finger. And, surely enough, he suddenly gave a cry of pain, and launched forth an oath like a clap of thunder.

He had flung his handful of brushes from the top of the steps. Then, blinded with rage, with one blow of his fist he transpierced the canvas.

Christine held out her trembling hands.

"My dear, my dear!"

But when she had flung a dressing-gown over her

shoulders and approached the picture, she experienced keen delight, a burst of satisfied hatred. The fist had struck "the other one" and there was a gaping hole! At last that other one was killed!

Motionless, horror-struck at his murder, Claude stared at that perforated shape. A poignant grief came to him at sight of the wound whence the blood of his work seemed to flow. Was it possible? Was it he who had thus murdered what he loved best of all on earth? His anger changed into stupor; his fingers wandered over the canvas, drawing the ragged edges of the rent together, as if he had wanted to close the flesh of a bleeding gash. He was choking; he stammered, distracted with gentle, boundless grief:

"She is killed, she is killed!"

Then Christine felt moved to her very soul in her maternal love for this big child of an artist. She forgave him as usual. She saw well enough that he now had but one thought—to mend the tear, to repair the evil at once; and she helped him, it was she who held the shreds together, whilst he from behind glued a strip of canvas against them. When she dressed herself, "the other one" was there again, immortal, only retaining in the vicinity of her heart a slight scar, which seemed to make her doubly dear to the painter.

As this unhinging of Claude's faculties increased, he drifted into a sort of superstition, into a devout belief of certain processes. Insanity seemed to be at the end of it all.

Poverty finished Claude off. It had gradually increased, while the family spent money without counting, and, when the last penny of the twenty thousand francs had gone, it swooped down upon them—horrible and irreparable. Christine, who wanted to look for work, was incapable of doing anything, even ordinary needlework. She bewailed her lot, twirling her

fingers, inveighing against the idiotic, young lady's education she had received, which left her the sole resource of going into domestic service, if life still went against them. Claude had become a subject of chaff with the Parisians—he no longer sold a picture. An independent exhibition, at which he and some friends had shown some pictures, had finished him off as regards amateurs—so merry had the public become at sight of his canvases, streaked with all the colors of the rainbow. The dealers fled from him. M. Hue alone made a pilgrimage now and then to the Rue Tourlaque, and remained in ecstacy before the exaggerated bits, before those that blazed in unexpected pyrotechnical fashion, in despair at not being able to cover them with gold. And though the painter wanted to make him a present of them, implored him to accept them, the old fellow displayed extraordinary delicacy of feeling. He pinched himself to amass a small sum from time to time, and then religiously took away the seemingly delirious picture, to hang it beside his masterpieces. Such windfalls came too seldom, and Claude had been obliged to descend to "trade art"—repugnant as it was to him—and such was his despair at having fallen into this path, where he had sworn never to set his feet, that he would have preferred starving to death, but for the two poor beings who were agonizing like himself. He became familiar with "Via Dolorosas" painted at reduced prices, with male and female saints at so much per gross, even with "pounced" shop blinds—in short, all the ignoble jobs that degrade painting and make it so much idiotic delineation, lacking even the charm of naïveté. He even suffered the humiliation of having portraits at five-and-twenty francs apiece refused, because he failed to produce a likeness; and he reached the lowest degree of distress, he worked according to size for the petty dealers who sell daubs on the bridges and export them to semi-civilized countries. They bought his pictures at two and

three francs apiece, according to the regulation dimensions. It was like physical decay, it made him waste away; he rose from such tasks feeling ill, incapable of serious work, looking at his large picture in distress, with the glances of one "damned," leaving it sometimes untouched for a week, as if he had felt his hands begrimed and unworthy of working at it. They scarcely had bread, and the huge shanty became uninhabitable in the winter, this shanty which Christine had shown herself so proud of on settling in it. She, once such an active housewife, now dragged herself about the place, without the courage even to sweep the floor, and everything lapsed into abandonment in the disaster, little Jacques weakened by unwholesome and insufficent food, their meals often consisting of a bare crust, taken standing. With their lives ill-regulated, uncared for, they were drifting to the filth of the poor, who lose even all self-pride.

At the close of another year, Claude, on one of those days of defeat, when he fled from his miscarried picture, met with an old acquaintance. This time he had sworn he would never go home again; he had been tramping across Paris since noon, as if he had heard, galloping at his heels, the wan spectre of the big figure, ravaged by constant retouching, and always left incomplete, pursuing him with an agonizing longing for birth. The mist was melting into a yellowish drizzle, soiling the muddy streets. It was about five o'clock, and he was crossing the Rue Royale like one walking in his sleep, at the risk of being run over, his clothes in rags and mud-bespattered up to his neck, when a brougham suddenly drew up.

"Claude, eh? Claude!—is that how you pass your friends?"

It was Irma Bécot, in a charming gray silk dress, covered with Chantilly lace. She had hastily let down

the window, and she sat smiling, beaming in the framework of the door.

"Where are you going?"

He, staring at her open-mouthed, replied that he was going nowhere. At this she merrily expressed surprise in a loud voice, looking at him with her saucy eyes, with the pouting, perverse lips of a grand lady, taken with a sudden longing for some unripe fruit lying on a petty greengrocer's stall.

"Get in, then, it's such a long while since we met. Get in, or you'll be knocked down."

And, in fact, the drivers were getting impatient and urging their horses on, amidst a terrible din, so he did as he was bidden, dazed; and she drove him away, dripping, with the unmistakable signs of his poverty upon him, in the blue satin brougham, where he was partly seated on the lace of her skirt, while the hackney drivers jeered at the elopement, before falling into line again to re-establish the traffic.

Irma Bécot had, at last, realized the dream of having a house of her own in the Avenue de Villiers. But it had taken her years to attain this result; the ground had been bought by one protector; the five hundred thousand francs which the building had cost, the three hundred thousand francs spent on furniture, had been contributed by others, at times when she luckily inspired a big passion. It was a princely dwelling, magnificently appointed, above all, exceedingly refined in its comfort; it was like the immense alcove of some idle woman, a huge couch, that began at the carpets of the hall and extended to the padded walls.

Irma, on reaching home with Claude, gave orders that she was in to nobody. She would have set fire to the whole of her valuable belongings to satisfy a whim. As they were passing together through the dining-room, a gentleman wished to come in, despite all prohibitions; but, without minding being overheard,

she told the servants, in a loud voice, to send him away. Then, when they sat down to dinner, she laughed with childish glee; she, who was never hungry, ate of everything; she feasted her eyes on the painter with a delighted look, diverted seemingly by his strong, ill-kept beard, and his working jacket, several buttons of which were missing. He, like one in a dream, remained passive throughout, also eating with the greedy appetite of great crises. The dinner passed off silently, the butler waiting upon them with proud dignity.

"Louis, you'll take the coffee and liqueurs to my room."

In the morning, when Claude was going, Irma, pink and fresh as if after a good night's rest, quite trim in her dressing-gown, her hair already arranged and she herself looking very calm, kept his hands for a moment in hers. Gazing at him with a tender, but, at the same time, chaffing look, she said, very affectionately:

"My poor old boy, I am very much pleased, very much pleased, indeed."

Claude went straight to the Rue Tourlaque, dazed, as it were, by this adventure. He felt a strange mixture of vanity and remorse, which, for a couple of days, left him indifferent to painting, musing whether after all he might not have taken the wrong course in life. Besides, he looked so strange on his return, so brimful of his escapade, that Christine questioned him, whereupon he at first stuttered and stammered, and finally confessed everything. There was a scene; she wept for a long while, then pardoned once more, full of infinite indulgence for his faults. However, towards the middle of the winter, Claude's courage revived once more. One day, while putting his old frames in order, he came upon a roll of canvas which had fallen behind the other paintings. It was the reclining woman of "In the Open Air," which he had cut out of the picture when it had come

back to him from the Salon of the Rejected. And, as he was unrolling it, he uttered a cry of admiration:

"By the gods, how beautiful it is!"

He at once secured it to the wall with four nails, and remained for hours in contemplation before it. His hands shook, the blood rushed to his face. Was it possible that he had painted such a masterly bit? He had had genius in those days then? So his skull, his eyes, his fingers had been changed? He got into such a state of feverish exaltation, he felt such a need of unburdening himself to some one, that at last he called his wife.

"Just come and have a look. Isn't her attitude good, eh? Ah, heaven! it's full of life!"

Christine, standing close to him, kept looking and answered him in monosyllables. This resurrection of herself, after so many years, had at first flattered and surprised her. But, seeing him get so excited, she gradually felt very uncomfortable, vaguely irritated, without knowing why.

"Say, don't you think her beautiful enough for one to go on one's knees before her?"

"Yes, yes! But she has grown rather blackish!"

Claude protested vehemently. Grown blackish! What an idea! That woman would never grow black; she possessed immortal youth. A veritable passion had seized hold of him; he spoke of her as of a living being; he had sudden longings to look at her that made him leave everything else.

Then, one morning, he was taken with a fit of work.

"But, confound it all, as I did this, I can surely do it again. Ah, this time, unless I'm a downright brute, we'll see about it."

And Christine had to give him a sitting there and then, for he was already perched on his steps, eager to set to work again at his big picture. For eight hours a day during a whole month he kept her there, her feet

numbed by immobility, pitiless for the exhaustion from which he saw her suffering and as ferociously callous about his own fatigue. He obstinately insisted upon producing a masterpiece; he was determined that his upright figure should equal that reclining one, which he saw on the wall, beaming with life. He constantly referred to it, compared it with the one he was painting, distracted and goaded by the fear of never more being able to equal it. He cast one glance at it, another at Christine, and a third at his canvas, and broke into cursing when he felt dissatisfied. He ended by abusing his wife.

"I don't wonder at it, my dear; you are not as you were at the Quai de Bourbon. Oh! not at all! Yes, yes, you may certainly pride yourself upon it, you used to have a lovely figure."

He did not say these things to wound her, he simply spoke as a critic, with half-closed eyes, talking of her as of an anatomical study that was degenerating. "The coloring is still splendid, but the shape is no longer what it used to be. Come, just look at yourself in the glass, and you'll notice."

With an affectionate glance at the reclining figure, he concluded:

"Of course, it isn't your fault, but it is evidently that which spoils my work. Ah, I've got no luck."

She listened; she staggered in her very grief. Those hours of posing, from which she had already suffered so much, were becoming an unbearable torture now. What was this new freak of crushing her with her girlhood, of fanning her jealousy by filling her with the poisonous regret of her vanished beauty. She was becoming her own rival, she could no longer look at that old picture of herself without being stung at the heart by hateful envy. Ah, how heavily had that picture, that study she had sat for, weighed upon her existence. The whole of her misfortunes sprang from that. And that picture

had come to life again, it rose from the dead, endowed with greater vitality than herself, to finish killing her, for there was no longer aught but one masterpiece—the reclining woman of the old canvas, who now simply rose up and became the upright figure of the new picture.

After that Christine felt herself growing older and older at every sitting. Lowering her eyes, she cast troubled glances at herself, and fancied that she could see wrinkles forming, the pure outlines of her figure becoming deformed. Never had she studied herself like that before; she felt disgusted and ashamed; she felt that infinite despair of women when love, like beauty, abandons them. Was it because of this that he no longer cared for her, that he sought refuge in an unnatural passion for his work? She lost the clear perception of things; she fell into a state of utter neglect, going about in a dressing jacket and a dirty petticoat, destitute of all coquettishness, and discouraged by the idea that it was useless to struggle, as she was old.

One day Claude, in a rage at an unsuccessful sitting, uttered a terrible cry, from the effect of which she was destined never to recover. He had almost shoved his fist through his picture again, beside himself, shaking with one of those angry fits, in which he seemed to become insane. And with his fist still clenched, he vented his rage upon her:

"No, decidedly I can do nothing with this! Look here, when a woman wants to play the model, she shouldn't get old."

Revolted at the insult, crying bitterly, she rushed away. He, full of remorse, had at once descended from the steps to console her.

"Come, I was wrong, I am a brute. I beg of you just pose a little longer to prove to me that you forgive me."

He caught her in his arms. And she pardoned once more, and resumed the pose, so shaken with grief as to

quiver painfully in every limb, while in her statue-like immobility, big, silent tears kept streaming down her cheeks. Yes, her child, it would have been better had it never been born. He was the cause of everything, perhaps. And she cried no longer; she was already excusing the father, harboring covert anger for the poor little being who had never aroused any maternal feelings in her heart, and whom she now hated, at the idea that it was he who had destroyed her.

This time, however, Claude stuck to his work obstinately, and he finished his picture, and swore that, come what might, he would send it to the Salon. He lived on his steps, cleaning up his backgrounds until dark. At last, thoroughly exhausted, he declared that he would not touch the canvas any more, and that day when Sandoz came to see him at four o'clock, he did not find him at home. Christine said that he had just gone out to take a breath of air on the heights of Montmartre.

The breach between Claude and his friends of the old band had gradually widened. Each of the latter's visits had become short and far between, for they felt uncomfortable face to face with this disturbing style of painting, and were more and more upset by the unhinging of the mind which had been the admiration of their youth; and now they all had fled; no one returned any more. Gagnière had even left Paris, to settle down in one of the two houses he owned at Melun, where he lived frugally upon the proceeds of the other one, after having abruptly, and to every one's surprise, married his music mistress, an old maid who played Wagner to him of an evening. As for Mahoudeau, he alleged work, for he was beginning to earn some money, thanks to a bronze manufacturer, who employed him to touch up his models. It was another affair with Jory, whom no one saw since Mathilde despotically kept him sequestrated. She stuffed him to bursting with nice little dishes, stupefied him, gorged him with everything he liked to such a

degree that he had fallen into a kind of domesticity comparable to that of a faithful dog, yielding up the keys of his cash-box, and only having enough money about him to buy a cigar on the days when she condescended to leave him a franc. It was even said that like the devotee she had once been, she had thrown him into the arms of the Church, in order to consolidate her conquest, and that she spoke to him about death, of which he was horribly afraid. Fagerolles, alone, affected a lively, cordial feeling towards his old friend whenever he happened to meet him, always promising to go and see him, which, however, he never did. He was so busy since his great success, in such request, advertised, celebrated, on the road to every imaginable honor and fortune! And Claude regretted no one but Dubuche, from a feeling of sneaking affection for the old reminiscences of his boyhood, notwithstanding the disagreements which the difference of their natures had provoked later on. But Dubuche, it appeared, was not very happy either, gorged, as he no doubt was, with millions, but leading a wretched life, constantly at loggerheads with his father-in-law (who complained of his having deceived him with regard to his capacities as an architect), and obliged to pass his life amidst the medicine bottles of his ailing wife and his two children.

Of all these dead friendships, therefore, there remained but that of Sandoz, who still found his way to the Rue Tourlaque. He came there for little Jacques, his godson, for the sorrowing woman also, that Christine whose passionate features amidst all this distress moved him deeply, like one of those creatures whom he would have liked to embody in his books. But, above all, his artistic fraternity had increased since he had seen Claude losing ground, foundering amidst the heroic folly of art. At first he had remained utterly astonished at it, for he had believed in his friend more than in himself. Since their college days, he had always placed himself second,

while setting Claude very high, on the same rung as the masters who revolutionize a period. Then he had been generously affected by this bankruptcy of genius; he had become full of bitter, bleeding pity at sight of this horrible torture of impotency. Did one ever know who was the madman in art! Every failure touched him to the quick, and the more the picture or the book verged upon aberration, fell into the grotesque and lamentable, the more he quivered with compassion, the more he longed to piously lull to sleep, in the extravagance of their dreams, those who were thus blasted by their own work.

On the day that Sandoz called, and failed to find Claude at home, he did not go away; but seeing Christine's eyelids red with crying, he said:

"If you think that he'll be in soon, I'll wait for him."

"Oh! he is sure not to be long."

"In that case I'll wait, unless I am in your way."

Never had she moved him to such a degree with her crushed look of a neglected woman, her listless movements, her slow speech, her indifference for everything but the passion that was consuming her. For the last week, perhaps, she had not put a chair in its place, not dusted a piece of furniture, leaving the place to go to wreck and ruin, scarcely having the strength to drag herself about. And it was enough to break one's heart to behold this misery head over heels in filth beneath the glaring light from the large window; to gaze on this ill-kept shanty, bare and full of disorder, where one shivered with melancholy in spite of the bright February afternoon.

Christine had slowly sat down beside an iron bedstead, which Sandoz had not noticed when he came in.

"Hallo," he said, "is Jacques ill?"

She was covering up the child, whose hands constantly flung off the bed-clothes.

"Yes, he hasn't been up for these three days. We

brought his bed in here so that he might be with us. He was never very strong. But he is getting worse and worse; it's distracting."

She gazed with a fixed stare and spoke in a monotonous tone, and he felt frightened when he drew up to the bedside. The child's livid head seemed to have grown bigger still, the skull so heavy now that he could not support it. He lay perfectly still, and you would have thought he was dead, but for the heavy breathing coming from between his discolored lips.

"My poor little Jacques, it's I, your godfather. Won't you say how d'ye do?"

The head made a fruitless, painful effort to lift itself, the eyelids parted, showing the white eye-balls, then closed again.

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! doctors, what do they know? We sent for one; he said that there was nothing to be done. Let us hope that it will pass over again. He is close upon twelve, and may be growing too fast."

Sandoz, quite chilled, said nothing for fear of increasing her anxiety, since she did not seem to realize the gravity of the disease. He walked about in silence and stopped in front of the picture.

"Ho, ho! it's getting on; it's on the right road this time."

"It's finished."

"What! finished?"

And when she told him that the canvas was to be sent to the Salon that next week, he looked uncomfortable, and sat down on the couch, like a man who wishes to judge without haste. The background, the quays, the Seine, whence uprose the triumphal point of the Cité, still remained in a sketchy state—masterly, however, but as if the painter had been afraid of spoiling the Paris of his dream by giving it a greater finish. There

was also an excellent group on the left, the lightermen unloading the sacks of plaster, carefully-worked bits treated in a powerful style. But the boat, full of women in the centre, transpierced the picture, as it were, with a blaze of flesh-tints, not in their proper place there; and the brilliancy, the hallucinatory proportions of the large figure, which Claude had painted in a fever, were strangely, disconcertingly false amidst the reality of the rest.

Sandoz, silent, felt despair stealing over him as he sat in front of this magnificent failure. But he saw Christine's eyes fixed upon him, and he had sufficient strength of mind to say:

"Astounding, the woman, astounding!"

At that moment Claude came in, and on seeing his old chum he uttered a joyous cry and shook his hand vigorously. Then he approached Christine, and kissed little Jacques, who had once more thrown the bed-clothes off.

"How is he?"

"Just the same."

"To be sure, to be sure; he is growing too fast. A few days' rest will set him all right. I told you not to be uneasy."

And Claude thereupon sat down by Sandoz's side on the couch. They both took their ease, leaning back, half reclining, their eyes gazing upwards surveying the picture, while Christine, seated by the bed, looked at nothing, seemed to think of nothing, in the everlasting desolation of her heart. Night was slowly coming on, the vivid light from the window paled already, losing its sheen in the slowly-falling, uniform, crepuscular dimness.

"So it's settled; your wife told me that you were going to send it in."

"Yes."

"You are right; you had better have done with it

once for all. Oh, there are some magnificent bits in it. The quay in perspective to the left, the man who shoulders that sack below. But—"

He hesitated, then finally took the bull by the horns:

"But it's odd that you have persisted in leaving those women in that state. It isn't logical, I assure you. You have set your heart upon them very much then?"

"Yes."

Claude answered curtly, with the obstinacy of the fixed idea which disdains to give any explanations. He had crossed his arms behind his head, and began talking of other things, without taking his eyes off his picture which the twilight commenced to darken with a slight shadow.

"Do you know where I have just come from?" he asked. "I have been to Courajod's. You know, the great landscape painter, whose 'Pond of Gagny' is at the Luxembourg. You remember, I thought he was dead, and we were told that he lived near here on the other side of the hill, in the Rue de l'Abreuvoir. Well, old boy, he worried me, did Courajod. While taking a breath of air now and then up there, I discovered his shanty, and I could no longer pass in front of it without wanting to go inside. Just think, a master, a fellow who invented our modern landscapes, and who lives there, unknown, done for, like a mole in its hole. Besides, you can form no idea of the street or the caboose, a village street, full of fowls, bordered by grassy banks; a caboose like a child's toy, with tiny windows, a tiny door, a tiny garden. Oh! the garden—a mere patch of soil, sloping down abruptly, planted with four pear trees, and the rest of it taken up by a fowl house, made out of green boards, old plaster and wire network, held together with bits of string."

His words came slowly; he was blinking his eyes as if the preoccupation of his picture had entered his very

soul, and was gradually taking possession of him to such a degree as to hamper him in his speech.

"And as luck will have it, to-day I find Courajod on his doorstep. An old man of more than eighty, wrinkled, shrunk to the size of a boy. I should like you to see him with his clogs, his peasant's jersey, his colored handkerchief wound over his head as if he were an old market-woman. I pluckily go up to him, saying, 'Monsieur Courajod, I know you very well; you have a picture in the Luxembourg gallery which is a downright masterpiece. Allow a painter to shake hands with you as he would with his master.' At this you should have seen him take fright, draw back and stutter, as if I were going to strike him. A regular flight. I followed him. Gradually he recovered his composure, and then he showed me his hens, ducks, rabbits, dogs, an extraordinary collection; there was even a raven. He lives in the midst of all these; he speaks to no one but his animals. As for the view, it's simply magnificent; the whole of the St. Denis plain, for miles upon miles; rivers, towns, smoking factory-chimneys, puffing railway-engines; in short, a real hermit's hole on the hill, with its back turned to Paris, its eyes on the boundless country. As a matter of course, I came back to his picture. 'Oh, Monsieur Courajod, what talent you showed. If you only knew how much we all admire you. You are one of our illustrations; you'll remain the ancestor of us all.' His lips had begun to shake again; he looked at me with his air of terror-stricken stupidity; I am sure he would not have waved me back with a more imploring gesture if I had unearthed under his very eyes the corpse of some forgotten comrade of his youth; he kept chewing disconnected words between his toothless gums; it was the mumbling of an old man, who has sunk into second childhood, and whom it's impossible to understand. 'Don't know—so long ago—too old—don't care a rap.' To make a long story short, he showed me

the door; I heard him hurriedly turn the key in the lock, barricading himself and his animals against the tentative admiration of the outside world. Ah, my boy, this great man ending his life like a retired grocer; this voluntary return into 'nothingness' before his death. Ah, the glory, the glory for which we others are ready to die!"

Claude's voice, more and more hushed, died away at last in a melancholy sigh. Darkness was still coming on, its flow, gradually collected at first in the corners, was rising like a slow, inexorable tide, submerging the legs of the chairs and the table, all the confusion of things littering the tiled floor. The lower part of the picture was already becoming dim, and Claude, with his eyes still desperately fixed on it, seemed to be watching the progress of the darkness as if he had at last judged his work in the agonizing daylight; while there was no sound but the stertorous breathing of the sick child, near whom there still loomed the dark outline of the mother, motionless.

Then Sandoz spoke in his turn, his hands also crossed behind his head, his back resting against one of the cushions of the couch:

"Does one ever know? Would it not be better, perhaps, to live and die unknown? What a sell it would be if this glory of the artist no more existed than the paradise talked about in catechisms and which even children now make fun of. We, who no longer believe in the divinity, still believe in our own immortality. What a farce!"

And with the melancholy of the pervading gloom stealing over him, he confessed himself, he spoke of his own tortures, stirred by all the human suffering he beheld:

"Look here, old boy, I, whom you envy, perhaps; yes I, who am beginning to get on in the world as middle-class people say, I, who publish books and earn a little

money—well, I am being killed by it all. I have often already repeated this to you, but you don't believe me, because, as you only turn out work with a deal of trouble and cannot bring yourself into public notice, happiness in your eyes could naturally consist in producing a great deal, in being seen, and praised or slated. Well, get admitted to the next Salon, get into the thick of the battle, paint other pictures, and then tell me whether that suffices, and whether you are happy at last. Listen: work has taken up the whole of my existence. Little by little, it has robbed me of my mother, of my wife, of everything I love. It is the germ thrown into the cranium, which feeds on the brain, finds its way into the trunk and limbs, and gnaws up the whole of the body. The moment I jump out of bed of a morning, work clutches hold of me, rivets me to my desk without leaving me time to get a breath of fresh air; then it pursues me at luncheon; I audibly chew my sentences with my bread. Next it accompanies me when I go out, comes back with me and dines off the same plate as myself; lies down with me on my pillow, so utterly pitiless that I am never able to set the book in hand on one side; indeed, its growth continues even in the depth of my sleep. And nothing outside of it exists for me. True, I go up-stairs to embrace my mother, but so absent-minded that ten minutes after leaving her, I ask myself whether I have really been to wish her good-morning. My poor wife has no husband; I am not with her even when our hands touch. Sometimes I have an acute feeling that I am making their lives very sad, and I feel very remorseful, for happiness is solely composed of kindness, frankness and gayety in one's household; but how can I escape from the claws of the monster? I at once relapse into the somnambulism of the working hours, into the indifference and moroseness of my fixed idea. If the pages, written during the morning, have been worked off all right, so much the better; if one of

them has remained in distress, so much the worse. The household will laugh or cry according to the whim of the all-devouring monster—work! No, no! I have nothing that I can call my own. In my days of poverty I dreamt of rest in the country, of travel in distant lands; and now that I might realize these dreams, the work that has been begun keeps me shut up. There is no chance of a walk in the morning's sun, no chance of running round to a friend's house, of a mad bout of idleness! My strength of will has gone with the rest; all this has become a habit. I have locked the door of the world behind me, and thrown the key out at the window! There is no longer anything in my den but my work and myself—it will devour me, and then there will be nothing left, nothing at all!"

He left off speaking; silence reigned once more in the deepening gloom. Then he began again with an effort:

"And if one were only satisfied, if one got some enjoyment out of this nigger's life! Ah! I should like to know how those fellows manage, who smoke cigarettes and complacently stroke their beards when at work. Yes, it appears that there are some with whom producing is an easy pleasure, to be set aside or taken up without the least excitement. They are delighted, they admire themselves, they cannot write a couple of lines without these lines being of a rare, distinguished, matchless quality. How can a man be sufficiently wanting in self-doubt as to believe in himself? It absolutely amazes me to see fellows, who furiously deny talent to every one else, lose all critical acumen, all common sense, when it becomes a question of their own offspring. Why, a book is always very ugly. To like it one mustn't have pottered about in the cooking of it. I say nothing of the jugsfull of insults showered upon you. Instead of annoying, they rather encourage me. I see men who are upset by attacks, who feel the humiliating want of winning sympathy. It is a simple question of

temperament; some women would die if they failed to please. But insult is a very good medicine to take; unpopularity is a very manly school to be brought up in. Nothing keeps one in such good health and strength as the hooting of a crowd of imbeciles. It suffices that a man can say that he has given his life's blood to his work; that he expects neither immediate justice nor serious attention; that he works without hope of any kind, and simply because the love of work beats beneath his skin like his heart, irrespective of any will of his own. If he can do all this, he may die in the effort with the consoling illusion that he will be appreciated one day or other. Ah, if the others only knew how jauntily I bear the burden of their anger. Only there is my own choler, which overwhelms me; I fret that I cannot live for a moment happy. What hours of misery, great heavens! from the very day I begin a novel. During the first chapters there is not much trouble. I have plenty of room before me in which to display genius. But afterwards I become distracted, never satisfied with the daily task; already condemning the book before it is finished, judging it inferior to its elders; torturing myself about certain pages, about certain sentences, certain words, so that at last the very commas assume an ugly look from which I suffer. And when it is finished—ah! when it is finished, what a relief! Not the enjoyment of the gentleman who exalts himself in the worship of his offspring, but the oath of the laborer who throws down the burden that breaks his back. Then it recommences; it will always recommence, and I shall die under it, furious with myself, exasperated at not having had more talent, enraged at not leaving a 'work' more complete, of greater dimensions, books upon books, a heap of mountain height. And at my death I shall feel horrible doubts about the task accomplished, asking myself whether I ought not have gone to the left when I went

to the right, and my last word, my last grasp, will be to recommence the whole over again!"

He was thoroughly moved; the words stuck in his throat; he was obliged to draw breath for a moment, before delivering himself of his passionate cry in which all his impenitent lyricism took wing:

"Ah, life! a second span of life, who shall give it to me that work may rob me of it again—that I may die of it once more?"

It had now become quite dark; the mother's rigid silhouette was no longer visible; the hoarse breathing of the child emerged from the obscurity like a terrible and distant signal of distress, uprising from the streets. In the whole of the studio, which had become lugubriously black, the big canvas only retained a glimpse of pallidity, a last remnant of waning daylight. The figure, similar to an agonizing vision, seemed to be floating about, without definite shape, the legs having already vanished, one arm being already submerged, the only part distinct being the flesh which shone like a silvery moon.

After a protracted silence, Sandoz asked:

"Shall I go with you when you take your picture?"

Getting no answer from Claude, he fancied he could hear him crying. Was it with the same infinite sadness, the despair by which he himself had been stirred just now? He waited for a moment, then repeated his question, and the painter, after having choked down a sob, stammered at last:

"Thanks, the picture will remain here; I sha'n't send it."

"What! you had made up your mind?"

"Yes, yes, I had made up my mind. But I had not seen it as I saw it just now in the waning daylight. I have failed with it, failed with it again—it struck my eyes like a blow from a fist, it went to my very heart."

His tears now flowed slow and scalding in the gloom that hid him from sight. He had been restraining

himself, and the drama, the silent anguish of which had consumed him, had burst forth despite his efforts.

"My poor friend," sighed Sandoz, altogether upset, "it is hard to tell you so, but all the same you are right, perhaps, to finish certain bits rather more. Still I am angry with myself, for I shall imagine that it's I who discouraged you by my everlasting and stupid discontent with things."

Claude simply answered:

"You! What an idea! I was not even listening to you! No; I was looking at everything going helter-skelter in this confounded canvas. The light was dying away, and at one moment, in the grayish dusk, the scales dropped suddenly from my eyes; the background alone is pretty; the woman is altogether too loud; what's more, she's out of the perpendicular and badly drawn—when I noticed that, ah! it was enough to kill me there and then; I felt life dropping out of me. Then the gloom kept rising and rising, a whirling sensation, a foundering of everything, the earth rolling into chaos, the end of the world. And look, look! there now remains nothing of her, not a glimpse; she is dead, quite black!"

And, in fact, the picture had at last entirely disappeared. But the painter had risen and could be heard swearing in the dense obscurity.

"D——n it all, it doesn't matter! I'll set to work at it again!"

Christine, who had also risen from her chair, against which he stumbled, interrupted him, saying:

"Take care, I'll light the lamp."

She lighted it and came back very pale, casting a look of hatred and fear on the picture. It was not to go then? The abomination was to begin once more!

"I'll set to work at it again," repeated Claude, "and it shall kill me, it shall kill my wife, my child, the whole lot; but, by Heaven, it shall be a masterpiece!"

Christine sat down again; they approached Jacques, who had thrown the clothes off once more in the feverish groping of his small hands. He was still breathing heavily, lying quite inert, his head buried in the pillow like a weight with which the bed seemed to creak. When on the point of going, Sandoz expressed his uneasiness. The mother appeared stupefied; while the father had already returned to his picture, the masterpiece to be created, the impassioned ideal of which outweighed with him the painful reality of the sufferings of his child, this living flesh of his flesh.

On the following morning, Claude had just finished dressing, when he heard the frightened voice of Christine. She also had just woke up with a start from the heavy sleep which had benumbed her while she sat watching the sick child.

"Claude! Claude! oh! look. He is dead!"

He rushed forward, with heavy eyes, stumbling, without seeming to understand, repeating with an air of profound surprise: "What do you mean by he is dead?"

For a moment they remained staring wildly at the bed. The poor little fellow, with his disproportionate head—the head of the progeny of genius, so exaggerated as to verge upon cretinism—did not appear to have stirred since the night before, only his mouth, which had widened and become discolored, breathed no longer, and his glassy eyes had opened. His father laid his hands upon him and found him icy cold.

"It is true; he is dead."

And their stupor was such that for yet another moment they remained with their eyes dry, merely struck, as it were, by the abruptness of the event which they considered incredible.

Then, her knees bending under her, Christine dropped down in front of the bed, bursting into violent sobs which shook her from head to foot, wringing her hands, her forehead pressed against the mattress. In that first

moment of horror her despair was aggravated above all by poignant remorse—the remorse of not having sufficiently cared for the poor child. Former days started up before her in a rapid vision, each bringing with it regretfulness for unkind words, deferred caresses, rough treatment even. And now it was all over; she would never be able to compensate him for the affection she had withheld from him. He whom she thought so disobedient had but too well obeyed at last. She had so often told him when at play to be still, and not to disturb his father in his work, that he was quiet at last, and forever. The idea suffocated her; each sob drew from her a stifled cry.

Claude had begun to walk up and down the studio, unable to remain still. With his features convulsed, he shed but large, unfrequent tears, which he regularly brushed away with the back of his hand. And when he passed in front of the little corpse he could not help glancing at it. The glassy eyes, wide open, seemed to exercise a spell over him. At first he resisted, but the confused idea assumed shape and would not be shaken off. He yielded at last, took a small canvas, and began a study of the dead child. For the first few minutes his tears dimmed his sight, wrapping everything in a mist; but he kept wiping them away, and stuck to his work although his brush shook. Then the passion for work dried his tears and steadied his hand, and in a little while it was no longer his icy son that was lying there, but merely a model, a subject, the strange interest of which stirred him. This exaggerated shape of the head, the waxy tint of the flesh, those eyes looking like holes staring into space, everything excited him, warmed him with a flame. He stepped back, seemed to derive pleasure from what he was doing, and vaguely smiled at his work.

When Christine rose from her knees, she found him

occupied in this way. Then, bursting into tears again! she only said:

"Ah! you can paint him now, he'll never stir again."

For five hours Claude kept at it, and on the second day, when Sandoz came back with him from the cemetery, after the funeral, he shuddered with pity and admiration at the sight of the small canvas. It was one of the fine bits of former days, a masterpiece of limpidity and power, to which was added a note of boundless melancholy, the end of everything; life ebbing away with the death of that child.

But Sandoz, who had burst out into exclamations full of praise, was quite taken aback on hearing Claude say to him:

"You are sure you like it? In that case, as the other machine isn't ready, I'll send this to the Salon!"

CHAPTER X.

PASSED SILENTLY BY.

CLAUDE had taken "The Dead Child" to the Palais de l'Industrie on the day before, when, one morning, while roaming round about the Parc Monceau he came upon Fagerolles.

"What!" said the latter cordially, "is it you, old fellow? What's becoming of you? What are you doing? We see so little of each other now."

Then Claude having mentioned what he had sent to the Salon—that little canvas which his mind was full of—Fagerolles added:

"Ah! you've sent something; then I'll get it 'hung' for you. You know that I'm a candidate for the hanging committee this year."

Indeed, amid the tumult and everlasting discontent of the artists, after attempts at reform, repeated a score of times and then abandoned, the authorities had just invested the exhibitors with the privilege of electing the members of the hanging committee; and this had quite upset the world of painters and sculptors, a perfect electoral fever had set in with ambitious cabals and intrigues, all the low jobbery by which politics are dishonored.

"I'm going to take you with me," continued Fagerolles; "you must come and see how I'm settled in my little house, in which you haven't yet set foot, in spite of all your promises. It's there, hard by, at the corner of the Avenue de Villiers."

Claude, whose arm he had gayly taken, was obliged

to follow him. He was seized with a fit of cowardice; this idea that his old chum might get his picture "hung" for him filled him with shame and desire at the same time. On reaching the avenue, he stopped in front of the house to look at its frontage, a bit of coquettish, precioso architectural tracery—the exact copy of a Renaissance house at Bourges, with lattice windows, a staircase tower and a roof decked with leaden ornaments. It was a perfect woman's jewel; and Claude was struck with surprise when, on turning round, he perceived Irma Bécot's regal mansion just over the way—the mansion where he had spent a night, the memory of which abided with him like a dream. Vast, substantial, almost severe of aspect, it retained the importance of a palace in front of its neighbor the artist, obliged to limit himself to a fanciful nick-nack.

"That Irma, eh?" said Fagerolles with just a shade of respect in his tone. "She has got a cathedral and no mistake! Well, you see I only sell paintings! But come in."

The interior of Fagerolles' house was strangely and magnificently luxurious: with old tapestry, old weapons, a heap of old furniture, Chinese and Japanese curios displayed even in the very hall. On the left there was a dining-room, panelled with lacquer work and with its ceiling draped with a red dragon; and then there was a staircase of carved wood above which banners drooped, whilst tropical plants rose up like plumes. Overhead, the studio was a marvel, rather small and without a picture visible, the walls being entirely covered with Oriental hangings, while at one end rose up a huge chimney-piece with chimerical monsters supporting the dorsal, and at the other extremity, a vast couch under a tent—the latter quite a monument, with lances upholding the sumptuously draped daïs, above a collection of carpets, furs and cushions heaped together almost on a level with the flooring.

Claude looked at it all, and there came to his lips a question which he held back: Was all this paid for? Fagerolles, who had been decorated with the Legion of Honor the year before, now demanded, it was said, ten thousand francs for painting a mere portrait. Naudet, who, after launching him, duly turned his success to profit in a methodical fashion, never let one of his pictures go for less than twenty, thirty, forty thousand francs. Orders would have fallen on the painter's shoulders as thick as hail, if he had not affected the disdain, the weariness of the man whose slightest sketches are fought for. And yet all this display of luxury smacked of indebtedness, there was only so much paid on account to the upholsterers; all the money, this money won by lucky strokes like on 'Change, slipped through the artist's fingers, and was spent without any trace of it remaining. Moreover, Fagerolles, still in the full flash of his sudden good fortune, did not calculate or worry, being confident that he would always sell his works at higher and higher prices, and feeling glorious at the high position he was acquiring in contemporary art.

Eventually, Claude espied a little canvas on an ebony easel, draped with red plush. Excepting a rosewood tube case and a box of crayons, forgotten on an article of furniture, nothing reminding one of the profession could be seen lying about.

"Very finely treated," said Claude, wishing to be amiable, as he stood in front of the little canvas. "And is your picture for the Salon sent?"

"Ah! yes, thank heaven! What a number of people I had here! A perfect procession which kept me on my legs from morning till evening during a week. I didn't want to exhibit, as it lowers one, and Naudet also opposed it. But what would you have? I was so begged and prayed; all the young fellows want to set me on the committee, so that I may undertake their defence.

Oh! my picture is simple enough. I call it 'A Picnic.' There are a couple of gentlemen and three ladies under some trees—guests at some château, who have brought a collation and are eating it in a glade. You'll see, it's rather original."

He spoke in a hesitating manner, and when his eyes met those of Claude, who was looking at him fixedly, he lost countenance altogether, and joked about the little canvas on the easel.

"That's a daub Naudet asked me for. Oh! I'm not ignorant of what I lack—a little of what you have too much of, old man. You know that I'm still your friend —why, I defended you only yesterday when I was with some painters."

He tapped on Claude's shoulders, he had divined his old master's secret contempt, and wished to win him back with his old-time caresses. Very sincerely and with a sort of anxious deference, he again promised Claude that he would do everything in his power to further the hanging of his picture.

However, some people arrived, more than fifteen persons came in and went off in less than an hour—fathers bringing young pupils, exhibitors anxious to say a good word on their own behalf, friends who wanted to truck influence, even women who placed their talents under the protection of their charms. And you should have seen the painter play his part as a candidate, prodigal with handshakes, saying to one visitor: "Your picture this year is so pretty, it pleases me so much;" feigning astonishment with another: "What! you haven't had a medal yet?" and repeating to all of them: "Ah! if I belonged to the committee, how I'd make them walk straight!" He sent every one away delighted, closed the door behind each visitor with an air of extreme amiability, through which, however, there pierced the secret sneer of the ex-lounger on the pavement.

"You see, eh?" he said to Claude, at a moment when

they happened to be left alone. "What a lot of time I have to lose with those idiots!"

Then he approached the large window, and abruptly opened one of the casements; and on the other side of the avenue, on one of the balconies of the house over the way, a white figure, a woman clad in a lace dressing-gown, could be distinguished waving her handkerchief. Fagerolles on his side waved his hand three times in succession. Then both windows were closed again.

Claude had recognized Irma; and amid the silence which had fallen Fagerolles quietly explained matters:

"It's convenient, you see, one can correspond. We have a complete system of telegraphy. She wants me, so I must go. Ah! old fellow, there's a girl who could give us lessons!"

"Lessons in what?"

"Why, in everything! What art, intelligence she has! If I told you that it was she who makes me paint! Yes, 'pon my word, she has an extraordinary scent of success! And, withal, still so funny, so amusing when she takes it into her head to love you."

Two little red patches of flame had risen to his cheeks, whilst a kind of stirred-up slush bleared his eyes for a moment. Since he and Irma had resided in the avenue, they again lived on their old footing. It was even said that he, so cunning, so well acquainted with Parisian humbug, let himself be fleeced by her, bled at every moment of some good round sum, which she sent her maid to ask for—to pay a tradesman, to satisfy a whim, often for nothing at all, or rather for the sole pleasure of emptying his pockets; and this partly explained his embarrassed circumstances, his indebtedness ever increasing despite the continuous rise in the quotations of his canvases. Moreover, he wasn't unaware of the fact that he was her superfluity, a fancy which, with her partiality for painting, she satisfied behind the backs of serious protectors. She joked over it; there was, so to say, the

corpse of their perversity between them, a kind of zest about the affair which made him laugh, forgetful of all the money he gave her.

Claude had put on his hat again. Fagerolles was shuffling about impatiently, looking nervously at the house over the way.

"I don't send you off, but you see she's waiting for me," he said. "Well, it's understood, your affair's settled, that is, unless I'm not elected. Come to the Palais de l'Industrie on the evening the voting papers are counted. Oh! there's a regular crush, quite a rumpus! Still you would always learn if you could rely on me."

At first, Claude inwardly swore that he would not disturb himself. Fagerolles' protection weighed heavily upon him; and yet, in his heart of hearts, he really had but one fear, that the shifty fellow would not keep his promise, but would be ultimately seized with cowardice at the idea of protecting the defeated. However, on the day of the vote, Claude could not keep still, but went and roamed about the Champs Elysées under the pretence of taking a long walk. He might as well go there as elsewhere, for, while secretly waiting for the Salon, he had altogether ceased work. He himself could not vote, as it was necessary to have been "hung" on at least one occasion. However, he repeatedly passed before the Palais de l'Industrie, the foot pavement in front of it interesting him with its turbulent aspect, its procession of artist electors whom men in dirty blouses seized hold of, shouting out the titles of their lists of candidates, lists some thirty in number emanating from every coterie, and representing every opinion—the list of the studios of the School of Arts, the liberal list, the list of the uncompromising radical painters, the conciliatory list, the young painters' list, and even the ladies' list. One would have said it was a scene of electoral madness at the door of a polling booth on the morrow of a riot.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, when the voting was over, Claude could not resist a fit of curiosity to go and have a look. The staircase was now free, and whoever chose could enter. Up-stairs, he came upon the vast gallery, overlooking the Champs Elysées, which was set aside for the hanging committee. A table, twelve mètres long, filled the centre of this apartment, and entire trees were burning in the monumental fireplace at one end of it. And some four or five hundred electors, who had remained to see the votes counted, stood there, mingled with friends and inquisitive strangers, talking very loud, laughing and letting a stormy rumble loose under the lofty ceiling. Around the table, parties of people who had volunteered to count the votes were already settled and at work; there were some fifteen of these parties in all, each comprising a chairman and two scrutineers. Three or four more remained to be organized, and nobody else offered assistance; in fact, every one fled in fear of the crushing labor which riveted zealous people to the spot throughout a part of the night.

It precisely happened that Fagerolles, who had been in the breach since the morning, was gesticulating and shouting, trying to make himself heard above the hubbub.

"Come, gentlemen, we need one more man here! Come, some willing person, over here!"

And at that moment perceiving Claude, he darted forward and forcibly dragged him off.

"Ah! as for you, you will just oblige me by sitting down there and helping us! It's for the good cause, dash it all!"

Claude abruptly found himself chairman of one of the counting committees, and performed his functions with the gravity of a timid man, feeling some emotion in his secret heart, and looking as if he believed that the hanging of his canvas would depend upon the conscientiousness he showed in this work. He called out the names

inscribed upon the voting-papers, which were passed to him in little packets, while the scrutineers noted down, on sheets of paper prepared for the purpose, each successive vote that each candidate obtained. And this went on in a most frightful uproar, in the noise, rattling like hail, caused by twenty, thirty names being called out at the same time by different voices, amid the continuous rumbling of the crowd. As Claude could never do anything without throwing passion into it, he waxed excited, became despondent whenever a voting-paper did not bear Fagerolles' name, and grew happy as soon as he had to shout out that name once more. Moreover, he often tasted this delight, for his friend had made himself popular, showing himself everywhere, frequenting the cafés where influential groups of artists assembled, even venturing to expound his opinions, engaging himself with the young artists, without neglecting to bow very low to the members of the Institute. There was a general current of sympathy. Fagerolles was, so to say, everybody's spoilt child.

Night came on at about six o'clock on this rainy March day. The assistants brought lamps; and some mistrustful artists, gloomy, silent figures watching the counting askance, drew nearer. Others began to play jokes, imitated the cries of animals, or launched out an attempted tyrolienne. But it was only at eight o'clock when a collation—cold meat and wine—was served that the gayety became overflowing. The bottles were violently emptied, fellows stuffed themselves with whatever they were lucky enough to get hold of, there was a free-and-easy kind of Kermesse in this vast hall which the logs in the fire-place lit up with a forge-like glow. Then they all smoked, and the smoke bedimmed the yellow light from the lamps with a kind of mist; whilst on the floor there trailed the voting-papers thrown away during the polling; indeed, a thick layer of dirty paper, together with corks, crumbs of bread and a few broken plates,

quite a litter, in which the heels of those at the table disappeared. Reserve was cast aside; a little sculptor with a pale face climbed on to a chair to harangue the assembled people, and a painter, with stiff moustaches under a hook nose, bestrode a chair and galloped round the table, bowing, and caricaturing the emperor.

Little by little, however, a good many grew tired and went off. At eleven o'clock there were not more than a couple of hundred persons present. Past midnight, however, some more people arrived, loungers in dress-coats and white ties, who had come from some theatre or soirée, stung with the desire to learn the result of the voting before all Paris knew it. Reporters also arrived; and they could be seen darting one by one out of the room as soon as a partial result was communicated to them.

Claude, hoarse by now, still called out the names. The smoke and the heat were becoming intolerable, a smell like that of a cow-house rose up from the muddy litter on the floor. One o'clock, two o'clock in the morning struck. He still unfolded, unfolded the voting-papers, and the conscientiousness which he displayed so delayed him that the other parties had long since finished their work while his was still entangled with columns of figures. At last, all the additions were centralized, and the definitive result proclaimed. Fagerolles was elected, coming fifteenth among forty, or five places ahead of Bongrand, who had been a candidate on the same list, but whose name must have been frequently struck out. And daylight was breaking when Claude reached home in the Rue Tourlaque, worn out and delighted at the same time.

Then, during a couple of weeks, he lived in anxiety. A dozen times he had the idea of going to Fagerolles' for information, but a feeling of shame restrained him. Besides, as the committee proceeded in alphabetical order, nothing perhaps was yet decided. However, one evening, on the Boulevard de Clichy, he felt his heart thump as he saw two broad shoulders, with whose

lolloping motion he was well acquainted, coming towards him.

They were the shoulders of Bongrand, who seemed embarrassed. He was the first to speak and said:

"You know matters aren't progressing very well over there with those brutes. But everything isn't lost. Fagerolles and I are on the watch. And you must rely on Fagerolles, for as for me, my dear fellow, I am awfully afraid of compromising your chances."

To tell the truth, there was a constant hostility between Bongrand and the president of the hanging committee, Mazel, a famous master of the School of Arts, and the last rampart of elegant buttery conventionality. Although they called each other "dear colleague," and made a show of exchanging handshakes, their mutual hostility had burst forth on the very first day; one of them could not ask for the admission of a picture without the other one voting for its rejection. Fagerolles, who had been elected secretary, had, on the contrary, made himself Mazel's amuser, his vice, and Mazel forgave this old pupil his defection, so skilfully did the renegade flatter him. Moreover, the young master, a regular turncoat, as his comrades said, showed even more severity than the members of the Institute for the beginners, the audacious ones; and he only became lenient and sociable when he wanted to get a picture accepted, showing himself fertile in funny devices on those occasions, intriguing and carrying the vote with the supple deftness of a conjuror.

This committee work was really a hard task, and even Bongrand's strong legs grew tired. The work was cut out every day by the assistants, an endless row of large pictures resting on the ground, leaning against the hand-rails, and stretching away through the galleries of the first floor, right round the Palace; and every afternoon, at one o'clock precisely, the forty committee-men, headed by their president, equipped with a bell, started off on

the same promenade, until all the initial letters in the alphabet had been exhausted. They gave their decisions standing; the work was got through as fast as possible, the worst canvases being rejected without going to the vote; at times, however, discussions delayed the party, there was a ten-minutes' quarrel, and the picture which had caused the dispute was reserved for the evening revision, while two men, holding a cord ten mètres long, stretched it tightly at a distance of four paces from the line of pictures, so as to keep back the flood of committee-men, who pushed each other in the heat of the dispute, and whose stomachs, despite everything, would bend the cord. Behind the committee marched the seventy museum-keepers in white blouses, executing their evolutions under the orders of a brigadier, and sorting the pictures at each decision communicated by the secretaries, the accepted paintings being separated from the rejected ones, which were carried off and laid aside like corpses after a battle. And the round lasted during two mortal hours, without respite, without there being a chair to sit down upon; the committee-men had to remain all the while upon their legs, in a tired tramp, amid icy draughts, which compelled even the least chilly among them to bury themselves in the depths of their fur-lined overcoats.

Thus the three o'clock snack was very welcome; half-an-hour's rest at a buffet where claret, chocolate and sandwiches could be obtained. It was there that the market of mutual concessions was held, the bartering of influence and votes carried on. So that no one might be forgotten amid the hail-storm of applications which fell upon the committee-men, most of them had little note-books, which they consulted; and they promised to vote for the exhibitors that a colleague protected on condition that this colleague voted for the ones whom they were interested in. Others, however, taking no part in these intrigues, either from austerity or indiffer-

ence, finished smoking their cigarettes, gazing vacantly about them.

Then the work began again, but more agreeably, in a gallery where there were chairs, even tables with pens and paper and ink. All the pictures which did not reach a mètre and a half in height were judged there—"passed on the easel," as the expression goes—being ranged, ten or twelve together, along a kind of trestle covered with green baize. A good many committee-men grew beatifically absent-minded on their seats, several wrote their letters, and the president had to get angry to obtain presentable majorities. Sometimes a gust of passion swept by; they all jostled each other; the votes, usually given by raising the hand, took place amid such feverish excitement that hats and walking-sticks were waved in the air above the tumultuous surging of heads.

And it was there, "on the easel," that "The Dead Child" at length made its appearance. During the last week Fagerolles, whose pocket-book was crammed full of memoranda, had resorted to all kinds of complicated bartering to obtain votes in Claude's favor; but it was a difficult business, it did not tally with his other engagements, and he only met with refusals as soon as he mentioned his friend's name. He complained, moreover, that he could get no help from Bongrand, who did not carry a pocket-book, and who, besides, was so clumsy that he spoilt the best causes by outbursts of unseasonable frankness. A score of times already Fagerolles would have forsaken Claude, had it not been for his obstinate desire to try his power over his colleagues by asking for this admission, a reputed impossibility. People should see if he wasn't yet strong enough to force the committee into compliance with his wishes. Moreover, perhaps from the depths of his conscience there came a cry for justice, an unconfessed feeling of respect for the man whose talent he had stolen.

As it happened, Mazel was in a frightfully bad humor

that day. At the outset of the sitting the brigadier had come to say:

"There was a mistake yesterday, Monsieur Mazel. A hors concours* picture was rejected. You know, No. 2520, a woman under a tree."

In fact, on the day before, this painting had been consigned to the grave amid unanimous contempt, without any one having noticed that it was the work of an old classical painter highly respected by the Institute; and the brigadier's fright, this good joke of a picture condemned by mistake, made the young members of the committee become very gay and sneer in a provoking manner.

Mazel, who detested these mishaps, which he felt were disastrous for the authority of the School of Arts, made a gesture of anger, and dryly said:

"Well, fish it out again, and put it among the admitted pictures. It isn't so surprising, there was an intolerable noise yesterday. How can one judge anything like that, at a gallop, when I can't even obtain silence." He rang his bell furiously, and added: "Come, gentlemen, everything is ready—a little good-will, if you please."

Unluckily, a fresh misfortune occurred as soon as the first paintings were set on the easel. One canvas among others attracted Mazel's attention, so bad did he consider it, of a sharpness of tone to make one's very teeth grate, and as his sight was failing him, he leant forward to look at the signature, muttering:

"Who's the swine?"

But he quickly drew himself up, quite shaking at having read the name of one of his friends, an artist who, like himself, was a rampart of healthy principles. Hoping that he had not been overheard, he called out:

"Superb! No. 1, eh, gentlemen?"

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*A painting by one of those artists who, having obtained medals at previous Salons, have the right to go on exhibiting as long as they live, the committee being debarred from rejecting their work, however bad it may be.

No. 1 was granted the formula of admission which entitled the picture to be hung on the line. Only, some of the committee-men laughed and nudged each other's elbows, at which Mazel was very much hurt and became fierce.

Moreover, they all did it; a great many of them eased their feelings at the first glance, and then recalled their words as soon as they had deciphered the signature. This ended by making them cautious, and so with a furtive glance they made sure of the artist's name before expressing an opinion. Besides, whenever a colleague's work, some fellow committee-man's suspicious-looking canvas, was displayed, they took the precaution to warn each other by a sign behind the painter's back: "Take care, no mistake, mind; it's his work."

Fagerolles, despite his colleagues' fidgety nerves, carried the day on the first occasion. It was a question of admitting a frightful portrait painted by one of his pupils, whose family, a very wealthy one, received him on a footing of intimacy. He had been obliged to take Mazel on one side, to try and move him by relating a sentimental story about an unfortunate father, with three daughters, who were dying of hunger; and the president had let himself be entreated for a long while: Dash it all, a man shouldn't waste his time painting when he is dying of hunger! He ought not to abuse his three daughters to such a point as that! However, in the result, Mazel raised his hand, alone, with Fagerolles. Some of the others at once protested, and became angry, even two other members of the Institute seemed revolted, whereupon Fagerolles whispered to them in a very low key:

"It's for Mazel! He begged me to vote. A relative of his, I think! At all events he greatly wants the picture to be accepted."

And then the two academicians promptly raised their

hands, and a great majority declared itself in favor of the portrait.

But laughter, witticisms, indignant cries resounded. "The Dead Child" had just been placed on the easel. Were they to have the Morgue sent to them now? And while the old men drew back in alarm, the younger ones scoffed at the child's big head, which was plainly that of a monkey who had died from trying to swallow a gourd.

Fagerolles at once realized that the game was lost. At first he tried to spirit the vote away by joking, in accordance with his skilful tactics:

"Come, gentlemen, an old combatant—"

Furious exclamations cut him short. Oh, no! not that one! They knew him, that old combatant! A madman who had been persevering in his obstinacy for fifteen years, a proud fellow who posed for being a genius, who had talked about demolishing the Salon, without ever sending a picture it was possible to accept. All their hatred of independent originality, of the competition of the "shop over the way," which frightened them, of that invincible power which triumphs even when seemingly defeated, resounded in the outburst of their voices. No, no! Away with it!

Then Fagerolles himself made the mistake of getting irritated, giving way to the anger he felt on finding what little real influence he possessed.

"You are unjust; at least be impartial," he said.

Thereupon the tumult reached its full height. He was surrounded, jostled, arms waved about in threatening fashion, and phrases were shot out like bullets.

"You dishonor the committee, monsieur!"

"If you defend that thing, it's to get your name in the newspapers."

"You aren't competent to speak on the subject."

And Fagerolles, beside himself, losing even the pliancy of his bantering disposition, replied:

"I'm as competent as you are."

"Shut up!" resumed a comrade, a very irascible little painter, with a fair complexion. "You are surely not going to try and make us swallow such a turnip as that!"

Yes, yes, a turnip! They all repeated the word with conviction, this word which they usually cast at the worst smudges, at the pale, cold, glareous painting of daubers.

"All right," at last said Fagerolles, with his teeth clenched. "I demand the vote."

Since the decision had become envenomed, Mazel had been unceasingly ringing his bell, very much flushed at finding his authority ignored.

"Gentlemen, come, gentlemen; it's extraordinary that one can't settle matters without shouting—I beg of you, gentlemen—"

At last he obtained a little silence. In reality, he was not a bad-hearted man. Why should they not admit this little picture, although he himself thought it execrable? They admitted so many others!

"Come, gentlemen, the vote is asked for."

He himself was, perhaps, about to raise his hand, when Bongrand, who had hitherto been silent, with the blood rising to his cheeks in the anger he was trying to restrain, abruptly went off like a pop-gun, and most unseasonably gave vent to this cry of his rebellious conscience:

"But, curse it all! there are not four among us capable of turning out such a piece of work!"

Some grunts sped around, but the sledge-hammer blow had come upon them with such force that no one answered.

"Gentlemen, the vote is asked for," repeated Mazel, who had turned pale, in a dry voice.

And his tone sufficed to explain everything: it was the latent hatred of Bongrand, the fierce rivalry hidden under seemingly good-natured handshakes. Matters

rarely came to such a pass as this quarrelling. They almost always arranged matters. But in the depths of their ravaged pride there were wounds which always bled, duels with the knife which tortured them with agony, despite the smile upon their lips.

Bongrand and Fagerolles, alone, raised their hands, and "The Dead Child," being rejected, only had the chance of being rescued at the general revision.

This general revision was the terrible part of the task. Although, after twenty days' continuous sitting, the committee allowed itself forty-eight hours' rest, so as to enable the keepers to prepare the work, it could not help shuddering on the afternoon when it came upon the assemblage of the three thousand rejected paintings, from among which it had to rescue as many canvases as were necessary for the regulation total of two thousand five hundred works admitted to be complete. Ah! these three thousand pictures, placed one after the other against the walls of all the galleries, including the outer one, in fact everywhere, even on the floors, lying there like stagnant pools, between which the attendants had devised little paths running alongside the frames—'twas an inundation, a deluge, which rose up, invaded the whole Palais de Justice, and submerged it beneath the murky flow of all the mediocrity and madness to be found in the stream of art. And but a single sitting was held, from one till seven o'clock, six hours of wild galloping through this maze! At first they held out against fatigue, their vision clear; but this forced march soon made their legs give way, their eyesight was irritated by all these dancing colors, and yet it was still necessary to march on, to look and judge, even until they broke down with fatigue. By four o'clock the march was like a rout, the scattering of a defeated army. Some committee-men dragged themselves along, out of breath, very far in the rear; others, isolated, lost amid the frames, followed the narrow paths, renouncing all

prospect of emerging from them, turning round and round without any hope of ever getting to the end! How could they be just and impartial, good heavens! What could they select from amid this heap of horrors! Without clearly distinguishing a landscape from a portrait, they made up the number they required in pot-luck fashion, so to say. Two hundred, two hundred and forty—another eight, they still wanted eight more. That one? No, that other. As you like. Seven, eight, it was over! At last they had got to the end, and they hobbled away, saved—free!

In one gallery a fresh scene had drawn them round "The Dead Child," lying on the floor among other waifs. But this time they jested. A joker pretended to stumble and set his foot in the middle of the canvas, while others trotted along the little paths, as if trying to find out which was the picture's right way up, and declaring that it looked much better topsy-turvy.

Fagerolles himself also began to joke.

"Come, a little courage, gentlemen; go the round, examine it, you'll be repaid for your trouble. Really now, gentlemen, be kind, rescue it; pray do that good action."

They all grew merry in listening to him, but they refused more harshly than ever, amid cruel laughter. No, no, never!

"Will you take it for your 'charity?'" cried a comrade.

It was a custom, the committee-men had a right to a "charity;" each of them could select a canvas among the lot, no matter how execrable it might be, and it was thereupon admitted without examination. As a rule, the bounty of this admission was bestowed upon poor artists. These forty paintings, rescued at the eleventh hour, were those of the beggars at the door, those whom one allowed to glide with empty stomachs to the far end of the table.

"For my 'charity,'" repeated Fagerolles, very much embarrassed; "the fact is, I meant to take another painting for my 'charity.' Yes, some flowers by a lady—"

He was interrupted by jeers. Was she pretty? In front of women's paintings these gentlemen were prone to sneer, not displaying the least gallantry. And Fagerolles remained perplexed, for the "lady" in question was a person whom Irma took an interest in. He trembled at the idea of the terrible scene which would ensue if he failed to keep his promise. An expedient occurred to him.

"Well, and you, Bongrand? You might very well take this funny little dead child for your 'charity.'"

Bongrand, wounded to the heart, indignant at all this bartering, waved his long arms.

"What! *I?* *I* insult a real painter in that fashion? Let him be prouder, dash it, and never send anything to the Salon!"

Then, as the others were still sneering, Fagerolles, desirous that victory should remain to him, made up his mind, with a proud air, like a fellow conscious of his strength, who does not fear being compromised.

"All right, I'll take it for my 'charity,'" he said.

The others shouted bravo, and gave him a bantering ovation, with profound bows and numerous handshakes. All honor to the brave fellow who had the courage of his opinions! And an attendant carried away in his arms the poor derided, jolted, soiled canvas; and thus it was that a picture by the painter of "In the Open Air" was at last accepted by the hanging committee.

On the very next morning a note from Fagerolles apprised Claude, in a couple of lines, that he had succeeded in getting "The Dead Child" admitted, but that it had not been managed without trouble. Claude, despite the gladness of the tidings, felt a pang at the heart; this note was so brief, there was such a protecting, pitying style about it, that all the humiliating features of the

business were apparent. For a moment, he felt sorry over this victory, so much so that he would have liked to take his work back and hide it. Then this delicacy of feeling died off, his artistic pride again gave way, so much did the protracted waiting for success make his human misery bleed. Ah! to be seen, to make his way despite everything! He had reached the point of final capitulations with conscience; he once more began to long for the opening of the Salon, with the feverish impatience of a beginner, living in a state of illusion which showed him a crowd, a press of moving heads, acclaiming his canvas.

By degrees Paris had decreed that the "varnishing day" was fashionable—that day formerly set aside for painters only, to come and finish off the toilets of their paintings. Now, however, it was like early fruit; it had become one of those solemnities which set the city agog, and made it rush off in a crushing crowd. For a week past the newspaper press, the streets, the public had belonged to the artists. They held Paris in their grasp, the one public question was themselves, their exhibits, their sayings or doings, everything connected with their persons. It was one of those infatuations like thunderbolts, the force of which raises paving stones, carried to such a point that bands of country folks, common soldiers and nursemaids pushed through the galleries on days of gratuitous admission, that the alarming figure of fifty thousand visitors was recorded on some fine Sundays, when an entire army, the rear battalions of the ignorant lower orders followed society, and marched, with eyes wide open, through this vast picture shop.

This famous varnishing day at first frightened Claude, who was intimidated by the crush of fine folks which the newspapers spoke about, and he resolved to wait for the more democratic day of the real inauguration. He even refused to accompany Sandoz. But he was consumed by such a fever that he started off abruptly at as early as

eight o'clock in the morning, barely taking time to eat a bit of bread and cheese beforehand. Christine, who did not feel that she had the courage to go with him, called him back and kissed him again, anxious and moved.

"And mind, my dear, don't worry, whatever happens."

Claude felt somewhat oppressed as he entered the Gallery of Honor, with his heart beating fast through having swiftly climbed the grand staircase. There was a limpid May sky out of doors, and through the linen vellum, stretched under the glazed roof, the sun rays filtered in a bright white light, while the neighboring open doorways, communicating with the garden gallery, admitted moist gusts of quivering freshness. For a moment he drew breath in this atmosphere which was already growing slightly heavy, being tainted with a vague smell of varnish, amid the discreet scent of the women's musk. At a glance he took in the pictures on the walls: a huge massacre scene in front of him, streaming with carmine; a colossal, pallid, religious picture on the left; a state order, the commonplace delineation of some official festivities on the right; and then portraits, landscapes, indoor scenes, all glaring in sharp tints amid the fresh gilding of the frames. However, the fear which he retained of the famous society present at this solemnity led him to direct his glances on the gradually swelling crowd. On the circular settee, placed in the centre of the gallery, and from which sprang a sheaf of tropical foliage, there sat three ladies, three monsters, attired in an abominable fashion, and settled there to indulge in a whole day's backbiting. Behind him he heard a hoarse voice crushing harsh syllables. It was an Englishman in a check-pattern jacket, explaining the massacre scene to a yellow woman, buried in the depths of a kind of travelling ulster. There were some vacant spaces, groups formed, scattered, formed again further on; all heads were raised; the men carried walking-

sticks and overcoats over their arms, the women strolled about slowly, showing Claude distant profiles as they stopped before the pictures; and his artistic eye was especially arrested by the flowers in their bonnets, which seemed very loud in tint, amid the dark waves of the men's high silk hats. He perceived three priests, two common soldiers who had found their way there no one knew whence, endless processions of gentlemen decorated with the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, troops of young girls and mothers impeding all movement. However, a good many of these people knew each other; there were smiles and bows from afar, at times a rapid hand-shake in passing by. The conversation was carried on in a discreet tone of voice, above which rose the continuous tramping of feet.

Then Claude began to look for his picture. He tried to find his way by means of the initial letters inscribed above the entrances of the galleries, but made a mistake, and went through those on the left hand. There was a succession of open entrances, a deep perspective of old tapestry door-hangings, with glimpses of the corners of pictures. He went as far as the great western gallery, and came back by the parallel suite of smaller galleries without finding his letter. And when he reached the Gallery of Honor again, the crowd had rapidly increased, in fact it was already scarcely possible to move about. Being unable to advance, he looked around him and recognized painters, the nation of painters, at home there that day and doing the honors of its abode. Claude especially remarked an old friend of the Boutin studio—a young fellow consumed with the desire to advertise himself—who had been working for a medal, and who was now catching hold of all the visitors possessing any influence and forcibly taking them to see his picture. Then there was the celebrated and wealthy painter who received his visitors in front of his work with a smile of triumph on his lips, showing himself

compromisingly gallant with the ladies, who formed a constantly renewed court around him; then also there were the others, the rivals who execrate one another, although they shout out one another's praises in full voices, the savage fellows covertly watching their comrades' success from the corner of a doorway, the timid ones whom you could not for an empire induce to pass through the gallery where their picture is hung, the jokers, hiding the bleeding wound of their defeat under an amusing witticism, the sincere ones, absorbed, trying to understand the various works, and already distributing the medals. And the painters' families were also there—one charming young woman accompanied by a coquettishly bedecked child; a sour-looking, skinny matron of middle-class birth, flanked by two ugly urchins in black; a fat mother, who had foundered on a bench amid quite a tribe of dirty brats; a lady of mature charms, still very good looking, who, with her grown-up daughter, was watching a woman pass by—this woman, the father's friend—and knowing each other by sight, they remained very calm, exchanging a smile. And then there were also the models—women who pulled one another by the sleeve, who showed each other their shapes in the pictorial displays, talking very loud, dressed without taste, spoiling their superb figures by such gowns that they seemed to be humpbacked.

When Claude got free of the crowd, he enfiladed the line of doorways on the right hand. His letter was on this side, but he visited the galleries marked with an L without finding anything. Perhaps his canvas, gone astray, had served to fill up a vacancy elsewhere. Then when he had reached the large eastern gallery, he set off along other little galleries, a secluded suite visited by fewer people, where the pictures seem to frown with boredom, and which is the terror of exhibitors. There again he did not find anything. Bewildered, distracted, he roamed about, went out on

the garden gallery, continued searching among the superabundant exhibits overflowing outside, pallid and shivering in the crude light; and eventually, after other distant excursions, he tumbled into the Gallery of Honor for the third time.

People were now crushing each other there. All those who create a stir in Paris were assembled together, similar to a rolling swell of water ever on the increase —the celebrities, the wealthy, the adored, talent, money and grace, the masters of romance, of the drama and of journalism, clubmen, racing men and speculators, women of every category, demi-mondaines, actresses and society belles. And Claude, angered by his vain search, grew amazed at the vulgarity of the faces, seen like this in a mass, at the incongruity of the toilets— but a few of which were elegant, while so many were common looking—at the lack of majesty which this society displayed, to such a point that the fear which had made him tremble was changed into contempt. Were these the people, then, who were going to jeer at his picture, providing it was found again? Two little reporters with fair complexions were completing a list of persons whose names they intended to mention. A critic pretended to take some notes on the margin of his catalogue; another was holding forth in professor's style in the centre of a party of beginners; a third, all by himself, with his hands behind his back, seemed rooted to one spot, crushing each work beneath his august impassibility. And what especially struck Claude was the way in which the people jostled each other and rushed all in the same direction like a flock of sheep, their banded curiosity which had nothing youthful or passionate about it, the bitterness of their voices, the weariness to be read on their faces, their general appearance of evil suffering. Envy was already at work; there was the gentleman who makes himself witty with the ladies; the one, who, without a word,

looks, gives a terrible shrug of the shoulders, and then goes away; the two who remain for a quater of an hour, leaning on the hand-rail, their noses close to a little canvas, whispering very low and exchanging the knowing glances of conspirators.

But Fagerolles had just appeared, and amid the continuous flowing and ebbing of the groups there seemed to be no one left but him, his hand outstretched, showing himself everywhere at the same time, lavishly exerting himself to play his double part as a young master and an influential member of the hanging committee. Overwhelmed with praise, thanks and complaints, he had an answer ready for every one without losing aught of his affability. Since the morning he had been withstanding the assaults of the petty painters of his set who found their pictures badly hung. It was the usual scamper of the first moment, every one looking for every one, rushing to see each other, bursting out into recriminations, noisy, interminable fury; the picture was too high up, the light did not fall upon it properly, the paintings near by destroyed its effect; in fact, some talked of unhooking their works and carrying them off. One tall, thin fellow was especially tenacious, going from gallery to gallery in pursuit of Fagerolles, who vainly explained that he was innocent in the matter and could do nothing. The order of the numbers was followed, the panels of each wall were laid on the ground and then hung up without any one being favored. He carried his obligingness so far as to promise his intervention when the galleries were re-arranged after the medals had been awarded, but without managing to calm the tall, thin fellow who still continued pursuing him.

Claude for a moment elbowed his way through the crowd to go and ask Fagerolles where his picture had been hung. But, on seeing his friend so surrounded, pride restrained him. Was there not something absurd and painful about this constant need of another?

Besides, he suddenly reflected that he must have skipped a whole suite of galleries on the right hand side; and, indeed, there were fresh leagues of painting there. He ended by reaching a gallery where a crowd was stifling, collected in a compact mass in front of a large picture which filled the central panel of honor. At first he could not see it, there was such a surging sea of shoulders with a thick wall of heads, a rampart of hats. People rushed forward with gaping admiration. At length, however, by dint of rising on tiptoe, he perceived the marvel, and recognized the subject by what had been told him.

It was Fagerolles' picture. And he found his own "In the Open Air" in this "Picnic," the same light key of color, the same artistic formula, but how softened, trickishly rendered, spoilt, with skin-deep elegance, everything being "arranged" with infinite skill to satisfy the low ideal of the public. Fagerolles had not made the mistake Claude did with his three women, but had clothed them in the audacious toilets of women of society. As for the two gallant gentlemen in summer jackets, they realized the ideal of everything most distingué; while afar off a footman was pulling another hamper off the box of the landau drawn up behind the trees. The whole of it, the figures, the drapery, the bits of still life of the repast, stood out gayly in full sunlight, against the darkened foliage of the background; and the supreme skill of the painter lay in his pretended audacity, the mendacious semblance of forcible treatment which upset the crowd just enough to send it into ecstacies—a storm in a pot of cream!

Claude, being unable to approach, listened to the remarks around him. At last there was one who depicted real truth! He did not press his points like those cranks of the new school; he knew how to convey everything without showing anything. Ah! the art of knowing where to draw the line, the art of letting things be

divined, the respect due to the public, the approbation of good society! And withal such delicacy, charm and art. He did not unseasonably deliver himself of passionate things of exuberant design; no, when he had taken three notes from nature, he gave those three notes, nothing more. A newspaper man who arrived went into ecstacies and coined the expression, "A very Parisian style of painting." It was repeated, and people no longer passed by without declaring that the picture was "very Parisian."

The swollen backs of the sight-seers, the admiring remarks rising from the sea of spines, ended by exasperating Claude; and seized with a longing to see the heads which made up a success, he doubled the throng and manœuvred in such a way as to lean his back against the hand-rail hard by. From that point, he had the public in front of him in the gray light filtering through the linen vellum of the ceiling which kept the centre of the gallery in shade; whilst the brighter light, gliding from the edges of the blind, illumined the paintings on the walls with a white flow in which the gilding of the frames acquired the warm tint of the sun. Claude at once recognized the people who had formerly derided him: if these were not the same, they were at least their relatives: serious, however, and enraptured, their appearance improved by their respectful attention. That evil look, that weariness of the struggle, that envious bile drawing the skin together and dyeing it yellow, which he had at first remarked on their faces, all disappeared here in the general treat of an amiable lie. Two fat ladies, open-mouthed, were yawning with satisfaction. Some old gentlemen opened their eyes wide with a knowing air. A husband whisperingly explained the subject to his young wife, who jogged her chin with a pretty motion of the neck. There was every kind of marvelling, beatifical, astonished, profound, gay, austere, with unconscious smiles and languid postures of the

head. The black silk hats were thrown back, the flowers in the women's bonnets glided to the napes of their necks. And all these faces, after remaining motionless for a moment, were then pushed aside and replaced by others like them.

Then Claude virtually forgot everything, hebetated by this triumph. The gallery was becoming too small, fresh bands constantly accumulated inside it. There were no more vacant spaces as there had been early in the morning, no more cool whiffs rising from the garden amid the ambient smell of varnish; the atmosphere was now becoming heated and bitter with the perfumes of the dresses. A smell like that of a wet dog soon dominated all the others. It must have been raining outside; one of those sudden spring showers had no doubt fallen, for the last arrivals brought moisture with them, their clothes hung heavily and seemed to steam as soon as they were exposed to the heat of the gallery. And, indeed, dashes of darkness had for a moment been passing above the vellum of the roof. Claude, who raised his eyes, guessed that large clouds were galloping onward lashed by the north wind, that driving rain was beating upon the glass panes. Moire-like shadows darted along the walls, all the paintings were bedimmed, the spectators themselves became blended in obscurity until the cloud was carried away, whereupon the painter saw the heads emerge from this twilight with the same mouths and eyes gaping with idiotic rapture.

But there was another cup of bitterness in reserve for Claude. On the left-hand panel he perceived Bongrand's picture, facing Fagerolles'. And in front of this painting there was no crush whatever, the visitors walked by with an air of indifference. It was, however, the supreme effort, the thrust the painter had been trying to give for years, a last work conceived in his longing to prove the virility of his decline. The hatred he harbored against the "Village Wedding," that first master-

piece which had weighed upon all his toilsome after life, had impelled him to select a contrasting but corresponding subject: the "Village Funeral"—the funeral of a young girl with relatives and friends straggling among fields of rye and oats. Bongrand had struggled with himself, saying that people should see if he were done for, if the experience of his sixty years was not worthy of the lucky dash of his youth; and now experience was defeated, the picture was destined to be one of those mournful failures like the silent fall of an old man, which does not even arrest passers-by in their onward course. There were still some masterly bits, the choir boy holding the cross, the group of Daughters of the Virgin carrying the bier, whose white dresses and ruddy flesh furnished a pretty contrast with the black Sunday toggery of the rustic mourners, among the green stuff; only the priest in his alb, the girl carrying the Virgin's banner and the family following the body were dryly handled; the whole picture, in fact, was displeasing in its very science and the obstinate stiffness of its treatment. You found in it a fatal, unconscious return to the troubled romanticism which had been the starting point of the painter's career. And the worst of the business was that there was a justification for the indifference with which the public treated this art of another period, this cooked and somewhat dull style of painting, which no longer stopped you on your way, since great blazes of light had come into vogue.

It precisely happened that Bongrand entered the gallery with the hesitating step of a timid beginner, and Claude felt a pang at the heart as he saw him give a glance at his solitary picture and then another at Fagerolles' which was fomenting a riot. At that moment the old painter must have been acutely conscious of his fall. If he had so far been devoured by the fear of slow decline, it was because he still doubted; and now he obtained sudden certainty; he was surviving himself, his talent was dead,

he would never more give birth to living, palpitating works. He became very pale and was making a movement as if about to turn and fly, when Chambouvard, the sculptor, entering the gallery by the other door, followed by his customary train of disciples, called out to him without caring a fig for the people present:

"Ah! you humbug, I catch you at it—admiring yourself!"

He, Chambouvard, exhibited that year an execrable "Reaping Woman," one of those stupidly spoilt figures which seemed like hoaxes, so unworthy were they of his powerful hands; but he was none the less radiant, feeling certain that he had turned out yet another masterpiece, and promenading his god-like infallibility through the crowd which he did not hear laughing at him.

Bongrand did not answer, but looked at him with eyes scorched by fever.

"And my machine down-stairs?" continued the sculptor. "Have you seen it? The little fellows of now-a-days may try it on, but we are the only masters—we, old France!"

And thereupon he went off, followed by his court and bowing to the astonished public.

"The brute!" muttered Bongrand, suffocating with grief, as indignant as at the outburst of some low-bred fellow beside a death-bed.

He had perceived Claude and approached him. Was it not cowardly to fly from this gallery? And he determined to show his courage, his lofty soul, into which envy had never entered.

"Our friend Fagerolles has a success and no mistake," he said. "I should be a hypocrite if I went into ecstacies over his picture, which I scarcely like, but he himself is really a very nice fellow indeed. Besides, you know how he exerted himself on your behalf."

Claude was trying to find a word of admiration for the "Village Funeral."

"The little cemetery in the background is so pretty!" he said at last. "Is it possible that the public—"

But Bongrand interrupted him in a rough voice:

"No compliments of condolence, my friend, eh? I see clear enough."

At this moment some one nodded to them in a familiar way, and Claude recognized Naudet, a Naudet who had grown and expanded, gilded by the success of the colossal strokes of business which he now-a-days jobbed. Ambition was turning his head; he talked about sinking all the other picture dealers; he had built himself a palace, in which he posed as the king of the market, centralizing masterpieces, and opening large art-shops of the modern style. One heard a jingle of millions on the very threshold of his hall; he held exhibitions at his place, ran up other galleries elsewhere; and each time that May came round, he awaited the visits of the American amateurs whom he charged fifty thousand francs for a picture which he himself had purchased for ten thousand. Moreover, he lived in princely style, with a wife, children, a friend, a country estate in Picardy and extensive shooting-grounds. His first large profits had come from the rise in the value of the works left by illustrious artists, now defunct, whose talent had been denied while they lived, such as Courbet, Millet, Rousseau; and this had ended by making him disdain any picture signed by a still struggling artist. However, ominous rumors were already in circulation. As the number of well-known pictures was limited, and the number of amateurs could barely be increased, a time was coming when business would prove very difficult. There was a talk of a syndicate, of an understanding with certain bankers to keep up the present high prices; the expedient of simulated sales was resorted to at the Hôtel Drouot—pictures bought in at a big figure by the

dealer himself; and bankruptcy seemed to be at the end of all this Stock Exchange jobbery, a tumble head-over-heels amid all this excessive, mendacious agiotage.

"Good-day, dear master," said Naudet, who had approached. "So you have come, like every one else, to see my Fagerolles, eh?"

He no longer treated Bongrand in the wheedling, respectful manner of yore. And he spoke of Fagerolles as of a painter belonging to him, of a workman to whom he paid wages, and whom he often rowed. It was he who had settled the young artist in the Avenue de Villiers, compelling him to have a little mansion of his own, furnishing it as he would have furnished a place for a woman, running him into debt with supplies of carpets and nick-nacks, so that he might afterwards hold him at his mercy; and now he began to accuse him of not being orderly, of compromising himself like a light-headed fellow. Take that picture for instance, a serious painter would never have sent it to the Salon; it made a stir, no doubt, and people even talked of its obtaining the medal of honor; but nothing could have a worse effect on high prices. When a man wanted to get hold of the Yankees, he ought to know how to remain at home, like an idol in the depths of his tabernacle.

"You may believe me or not, my dear fellow," he said to Bongrand, "but I would have given twenty thousand francs out of my pocket to prevent those stupid newspapers from making all this row about my Fagerolles this year."

Bongrand, who, despite his sufferings, was listening bravely, smiled.

"In point of fact," he said, "they are perhaps carrying indiscretion too far. I read an article yesterday in which I learnt that Fagerolles ate two boiled eggs every morning."

He laughed over the brutal puffing which, after a first

article on the "young master's" picture, as yet seen by nobody, had for a week past kept all Paris occupied with his person. The whole fraternity of reporters had been campaigning, stripping Fagerolles to the skin, telling their readers all about his father, the artistic zinc manufacturer, his education, the house in which he resided, how he lived, even revealing the color of his socks, and mentioning a habit he had of pinching his nose. And he was the passion of the hour, the young master according to the tastes of the day, who had been lucky enough to miss the Prix de Rome and break off with the School of Arts, whose principles, however, he retained: 'twas the fortune of a season which the wind brings and blows away again, a nervous whim of the great lunatic city, the success of that style of painting which aims merely at approximating reality, not at rendering it in all its truth; 'twas the triumph of pearl gray audacity, a stir like that occasioned by some accident which upsets the crowd in the morning, and is forgotten by night in the general indifference.

However, Naudet remarked the "Village Funeral."

"Hallo! that's your picture, eh?" he said. "So you wanted to give a companion to the 'Wedding?' Well, I should have tried to dissuade you! Ah! the 'Wedding!' the 'Wedding!'"

Bongrand still listened to him without ceasing to smile; barely a twinge of pain passed over his trembling lips. He forgot his masterpieces, the certainty of leaving an immortal name, he was only cognizant of the vogue which this youngster, unworthy of cleaning his palette, had acquired at once and without an effort, this vogue which seemed to be pushing him, Bongrand, into oblivion—he who had struggled for ten years before he had succeeded in making himself known. Ah! when the new generations bury you, if they only knew what tears of blood they make you shed in death!

Then, as he had remained silent, he was seized with

the fear of having allowed his suffering to be divided. Was he falling to the baseness of envy? Anger with himself made him raise his head—a man should die erect. And instead of giving the violent answer which was rising to his lips, he said in a familiar way:

"You are right, Naudet, I should have done better to have gone to bed on the day that the idea of that picture occurred to me."

"Ah! it's he; excuse me!" cried the dealer, making off.

It was Fagerolles showing himself at the entrance of the gallery. He discreetly stood there without entering, carrying his good fortune with the ease of a man who knows what he is about. Besides, he was looking for some one; he made a sign to a young man, and gave him an answer, a favorable one, no doubt, for the young chap brimmed over with gratitude. Two other persons sprang forward to congratulate him; a woman detained him, showing him, with a martyr's gesture, a bit of still life, hung in a dark corner. Then he disappeared, after casting but one glance on the people in raptures before his picture.

Claude, who had looked and listened, then felt sadness submerging his heart. The crush was still increasing, he now had naught before him but faces gaping and sweating in the heat which had become intolerable. Above the nearer shoulders, other shoulders rose up, and so on, as far as the door whence those who could not see anything pointed out the painting to each other with the tips of their umbrellas, dripping from the showers outside. And Bongrand remained there out of pride, erect in defeat, firmly planted on his legs, those of an old combatant, and gazing with limpid eyes upon ungrateful Paris. He wished to finish like a brave man, whose kindness of heart is boundless. Claude, who spoke to him without receiving any answer, saw very well that there was nothing behind this calm, gay face; the mind

was absent, it had flown away in mourning, bleeding with frightful torture; and then seized with frightened respect, he did not insist but went off, without Bongrand's vacant eyes even noticing his departure.

A new idea had just impelled Claude onward through the crowd. He was lost in wonderment at not having been able to discover his picture. But nothing could be more simple. Was there not some gallery where people grinned, some nook full of noise and banter, a gathering of jesting spectators, insulting a picture? That picture would assuredly be his. He could still hear the laughter of the by-gone Salon of the Rejected. And now at the door of each gallery he listened to ascertain if it were there that he was being hissed.

However, as he found himself once more in the Eastern Gallery, that kind of hall where great art agonizes, that depository where vast, cold and gloomy historical and religious compositions are accumulated, he started, and remained motionless, his eyes in the air. He had passed, however, through this gallery twice already, and yet that was certainly his picture up there, so high up that he hesitated about recognizing it; it looked, indeed, so little, poised like a swallow on the corner of a frame, the monumental frame of an immense painting ten mètres long, representing the "Deluge," a swarming of yellow figures turning topsy-turvy in water which had the color of wine lees. On the left, moreover, there was the pitiable cindery-tinted portrait of a general; on the right a colossal nymph in a moonlit landscape—the bloodless corpse of a murdered woman rotting away on the grass; and everywhere around there were pinky and violet shaded things, mournful compositions, together with a comic scene of some monks getting drunk, and an "Opening of the Chamber of Deputies," with a whole page of writing on a gilded cartouch, bearing the heads of the well-known deputies, drawn in outline, together with their names. And high up, high up, amid these livid neighbors, the

little canvas, too brutal in its treatment, glared ferociously with the painful grimace of a monster.

Ah! the "Dead Child." At this distance the wretched little creature was but a confused mass of flesh, the foundered carcass of some shapeless animal. Was that swollen, whitened head a skull or a stomach? And those poor hands twisted among the bedclothes, like the bent claws of a bird killed by cold! And the bed itself, that pallidity of the sheets, below the pallidity of the limbs, all that white looking so sad, those tints fading away as if typical of the supreme end. But, afterwards, you distinguished the light eyes staring fixedly, and you recognized a child's head; it seemed a case of some disease of the brain, profoundly and frightfully pitiful.

Claude approached, and then drew back to see the better. The light was so bad that refractions darted from all points across the canvas. How they had hung his little Jacques! no doubt out of disdain, or perhaps from shame, so as to get rid of his lugubrious ugliness. But Claude evoked the little fellow's presentment, and beheld him again over there in the country, looking fresh and pinky, as he rolled about in the grass; then in the Rue de Douai, having grown pale and stupid by degrees, then in the Rue Tourlaque, no longer able to carry his head, and dying one night, all alone, while his mother was asleep; and he beheld her also, that mother, the sad woman who had stopped at home, to weep there, no doubt, as she was now in the habit of doing during entire days. No matter, she had been right in not coming; 'twas too mournful—their little Jacques, already cold in his bed, cast on one side like a pariah, and so brutalized by the dancing light that his face seemed to laugh, distorted by an abominable grin.

And Claude suffered still more from the loneliness of his work. Astonishment and deception made him seek for the crowd, the rush which he had anticipated. Why was he not jeered? Ah! the insults of yore, the mock-

ing, the indignation, that had rent his heart, but made him live! No, nothing more, not even a look in passing: it was death. The spectators defiled rapidly through the vast gallery, seized with a shudder of boredom. There were merely some people in front of the "Opening of the Chamber," where a knot of spectators constantly collected, reading the inscriptions and showing each other the deputies' heads. Hearing some laughter behind him, he turned round, but nobody was jeering, some visitors were simply making merry over the tipsy monks, the comic success of the Salon, which some gentlemen were explaining to some ladies, declaring that it was dazzlingly witty. And all these people passed by under little Jacques, and not a head was raised, not a soul even knew that he was up there.

However, the painter had a gleam of hope. On the central settee, two personages, one of them fat and the other thin, and both of them decorated with the Legion of Honor, sat talking, half-reclining against the velvet back, and looking at the pictures in front of them. Claude drew near them and listened.

"And I followed them," said the fat fellow. "They went along the Rue St. Honoré, the Rue St. Roch, the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, the Rue La Fayette."

"And you spoke to them?" asked the thin man, who seemingly was deeply interested.

"No, I was afraid of getting in a rage."

Claude went off and returned on three occasions, his heart beating fast each time that some visitor stopped short and glanced slowly from the line to the ceiling. He felt an unhealthy longing to hear one word, but one. Why exhibit? How fathom public opinion? Anything rather than this torturing silence! And he almost suffocated when he saw a young married couple approach, the husband a good-looking fellow, with little fair moustache, the wife, charming, with the delicate slim figure of a shepherdess in Dresden china. She had perceived

the picture, and asked what the subject was, stupefied that she could make nothing out of it; and when her husband, turning over the leaves of the catalogue, had found the title, "The Dead Child," she dragged him away, shuddering, and raising this cry of affright:

"Oh! the horror! The police oughtn't to allow such horrors!"

Then Claude remained there, erect, unconscious and haunted, his eyes raised on high, amid the continuous flocking of the crowd which trotted by, quite indifferent, and without one glance for that unique sacred thing, visible to him alone. And it was there that Sandoz came upon him, amid the jostling.

The novelist, who had been strolling about alone—his wife having remained at home beside his ailing mother—had just stopped short, heart-rent, below the little canvas, which he had espied by chance. Ah! how disgusted he felt with this wretched life! He abruptly lived the days of his youth over again—the college of Plassans, his freaks with Claude on the banks of the Viorne, their long excursions under the burning sun, all the flaming of their early ambitions: and, later on, in their common life, he remembered their efforts, their certainty of coming glory, that fine, irresistible, immoderate appetite that had made them talk of swallowing Paris at one bite. How many times, at that period, had he seen in Claude the great man, whose unbridled genius would leave the talent of all the others very far in the rear! First had come the studio of the Impasse des Bourdonnais, later on the studio of the Quai de Bourbon, with dreams of vast compositions, projects calculated to make the Louvre burst; and meanwhile the struggle was incessant, ten hours' labor a day, the consecration of his whole being to his work. And then what? After twenty years of that passionate life he ended like that—he finished with that poor, sinister little thing, which no one noticed, and which looked distressfully sad in its

leper-like solitude. So much hope and torture, a lifetime spent in the toil of creating, to come to that, to that, good God!

Sandoz recognized Claude standing near by, and fraternal emotion made his voice quake:

"What! so you came? Why did you refuse to call for me then?"

The painter did not even apologize. He seemed very tired, struck with soft, somniferous stupor.

"Come, don't stay here," added Sandoz. "It's past twelve o'clock and you must lunch with me. Some people were to wait for me at Ledoyen's. But I shall give them the go-by; let's go down to the buffet; we shall pick up our spirits there, eh, old fellow?"

And Sandoz led him away, holding his arm, pressing it, warming it, trying to draw him from his mournful silence.

"Come, dash it all! You mustn't give way like that. Although they have hung your picture badly, it is superb all the same, a real bit of genuine painting! Oh! I know that you dreamed of something else! But you are not dead yet; it will be for later on. And, just look, you ought to be proud, for it's you who really triumph at the Salon this year. Fagerolles isn't the only one who pillages you; they all imitate you now; you have revolutionized them since your 'In the Open Air,' which they laughed so much about! Look, look, there's an 'open air' effect—and there's another, and here and there—they all do it!"

He waved his hand towards the pictures, as he and Claude passed along the galleries. In point of fact, the dash of clear light, introduced by degrees into contemporary painting, had fully burst forth at last. The dingy Salon of yore with its bituminous canvases had made way for a Salon full of sunshine, gay like spring itself. It was the dawn, the aurora which had first gleamed at the Salon of the Rejected, and which was

now rising and rejuvenating the pictures with a fine diffused light, decomposed in infinite shades. On all sides you found that bluey tinge, even in the portraits and the genre scenes, which had acquired the dimensions and the serious character of historical paintings. The old academical subjects had disappeared, with the cooked juices of tradition, as if the condemned doctrine had carried its people of shadows away with it; works of pure imagination were becoming few and far between—the cadaverous oddities of mythology and catholicism for instance, the legendary subjects painted without faith, the anecdotic bits destitute of life, in fact, all the bric-á-brac of the School of Arts used up by generations of tricksters and fools; and the influence of the new principle was evident even among those artists who lingered over the antique recipes, even among the masters, now grown old; the flash of sunlight had penetrated to their studios. From afar, at every step you took, you saw a painting transpierce the wall and form, as it were, a window with an outdoor view. Soon the walls themselves would fall; nature would walk in; for the breach was a broad one; and the assault had driven routine away in this gay battle fought by audacity and youth.

"Ah! your lot is a fine one, all the same, old fellow!" continued Sandoz. "The art of to-morrow will be yours; you have made them all."

Claude thereupon opened his mouth and, with an air of gloomy brutality, said in a low voice:

"What the deuce do I care if I have made them all, when I haven't made myself? See here, it's too big an affair for me, and that's what stifles me."

He made a gesture to finish expressing his thought—his inability to prove himself the genius of the formula he laid down, the torture he felt at being merely a precursor, the one who sows the idea without reaping the glory, his grief at seeing himself pillaged, devoured by men who turned out hasty work, by a whole flight of

fellows who scattered their efforts and lowered the new art, before he or another had had strength enough to produce the masterpiece which would make the end of this century a date in art.

Sandoz protested, the future lay open. Then to divert Claude, he stopped him, while crossing the Gallery of Honor, and said:

"Just look at that lady in blue before that portrait! What a slap nature does give to painting! You remember when we used to look at the public, the dresses, the animation of the galleries in former times? Not a painting then withstood the shock. And yet now there are some which don't get damaged too much. I even noticed, over there, a landscape, the general yellowish tinge of which completely eclipsed all the women who approached it."

Claude was quivering with unutterable suffering.

"Pray, let's go," he said; "take me away—I can't stand it any longer."

They had all the trouble in the world to find a free table in the refreshment room. People were stifling, pressed together in the vast shady retreat, girt round with brown serge drapery under the girders of the lofty iron flooring of the up-stairs galleries. In the background, and but partially visible in the darkness, there were three dressers displaying dishes of preserved fruit symmetrically ranged on their shelves; while, nearer at hand, at counters placed right and left, two ladies, a dark one and a fair one, watched the crowd with a military air; and from the dim depths of this seeming cavern there came a sea of little marble tables, a tide of chairs, serried, entangled, surging, swelling, overflowing and spreading out in the garden, under the broad pallid light which fell from the glass roof.

At last, Sandoz saw some people rise up. He darted forward and conquered the vacant table by sheer struggling amid the mob.

"Ah! dash it! we are here at all events! What will you have to eat?"

Claude made a gesture of indifference. The lunch was execrable, some trout softened by over-boiling, undercut of beef dried up in the oven, asparagus smelling of moist linen, and, into the bargain, you had to fight to get served, for the waiters, hustled about and, losing their heads, remained in distress in the narrow passages which the flux of the chairs constantly contracted until it blocked them altogether. Behind the hanging on the left, one would hear a racket of saucepans and crockery; the kitchen being installed there on the sand, like those Kermesse cook-shops, which camp by the roadside in the open air.

Sandoz and Claude had to eat, seated obliquely, and half-strangled between two parties of people whose elbows ended by almost getting into their plates; and each time that a waiter passed by he shook the chairs with a violent knock of his hips. However, the inconvenience, like the abominable cookery, made one gay. People jested about the dishes, different tables fraternized together in the common misfortune, which brought about a kind of pleasure party. Strangers ended by sympathizing; friends kept up conversations, although seated three rows distant from one another and obliged to turn their heads and gesticulate over their neighbors' shoulders. The women, particularly, became animated, at first rather anxious as to the crush, and then unglov-ing their hands, catching up their skirts, and laughing at the first thimbleful of neat wine they drank. And the real spiciness of this "varnishing day" lay in the promiscuity with which all circles of society elbowed one another, girls, ladies, great artists and simple fools; and these chance meetings produced a mixture, the unexpected suggestiveness of which lent a sparkle even to the eyes of the best conducted folks.

However, Sandoz, who had renounced finishing his

meat, raised his voice amid the terrible hubbub caused by the chatter and the serving:

"A bit of cheese, eh? And let's try to get some coffee."

Claude, whose eyes looked dreamy, did not hear. He was gazing into the garden. From his seat he could see the central clump of verdure, some lofty palms which stood in relief against the gray hangings with which the garden was decorated all around. A circle of statues was set out there; and you could see the back of a fauness; a pretty side view of the figure of a young girl with full cheeks; the face of a bronze Gaul, a colossal bit of romanticism irritating with its stupid assumption of patriotism; a woman hanging by the wrists, some Andromeda of the Place Pigalle; and others, and others still, rows of shoulders and hips, which followed the bends of the pathways, heads, breasts, legs, arms, all mingled and growing indistinct in the distance. On the left stretched a line of busts, such delightful ones, furnishing the comical and uncommon sight of a suite of noses—a priest with a huge, pointed nose, a soubrette with a turn-up nose, a fifteenth-century Italian woman with a handsome classical nose, a sailor with a mere fancy nose—in fact, every kind of nose, the magistrate's nose, the manufacturer's nose, the nose of the gentleman decorated with the Legion of Honor, all of them motionless and ranged in endless succession.

However, Claude saw nothing of them; to him they were but gray spots in the hazy, greenish light. His stupor still lasted, and he was only conscious of one thing, the luxuriousness of the women's dresses, of which he had formed a wrong estimate amid the pushing in the galleries, and which were here freely displayed, as if the wearers had been promenading over the gravel in the conservatory of some château. All the elegance of Paris passed by, the women who had come to show themselves, in dresses thoughtfully combined and des-

tined to be described in the morrow's newspapers. People stared a great deal at an actress walking about with a queen-like tread and leaning on the arm of a gentleman who assumed the complacent air of a prince consort. The women of society took one another's measure, estimating the value of the silk, the length of the lace, and ferreting everywhere from the tips of the boots to the feathers on the bonnet. This was neutral ground, so to say; some ladies who were seated had drawn their chairs together, after the fashion in the garden of the Tuileries, and occupied themselves exclusively with those of their sex who passed by. Two female friends quickened their pace, laughing. Another woman, all alone, walked up and down, mute, with a black look in her eyes. Some others, who had lost one another, met again, and began ejaculating about the adventure. And in the meantime the dark moving mass of men came to a stand-still, then set off again till it stopped short in front of a bit of marble or eddied back in front of a bit of bronze. And among the mere cits, who were but few in number, though all of them looked out of their element there, moved men with celebrated names, all the illustrations of Paris, a name of resounding glory as a fat, ill-clad gentleman passed by, the winged name of a poet as a pale man with a flat, common face approached. A living undulation was uprising from this crowd in the even, colorless light, when suddenly a flash of sunshine, from behind the clouds of a final shower, set the glass panes on high aflame, made the stained window on the western side resplendent, and rained down in golden particles through the still atmosphere; and then everything became warm, the snowy statues amid the shiny green stuff, the soft lawns disjointed by the yellow sand of the pathways, the rich dresses with their satin and their beads brightly reflecting, even the very voices, the nervous, hilarious murmur of which seemed to crackle like a bright fire of vine

shoots. Some gardeners, completing the arrangement of the flower-beds, turned the taps of the water pipes and promenaded about with their pots, the shower squirting from which was exhaled by the drenched grass in tepid steam. And meanwhile a plucky sparrow, who had come down from the iron girders, despite the number of people, was dipping his beak in the sand in front of the buffet, eating some crumbs which a young woman threw him by way of amusement. Of all the tumult, however, Claude only heard the ocean-like din afar, the rumbling of the people rolling onwards in the galleries. And a recollection came to him, he remembered that noise, which had burst forth like a hurricane in front of his picture at the Salon of the Rejected. But, nowadays, people no longer laughed; up-stairs, the giant breath of Paris was acclaiming Fagerolles.

It precisely happened that Sandoz, who had turned round, said to Claude: "Hallo! there's Fagerolles!"

And, indeed, Fagerolles and Jory had just laid hands on a table near by without remarking their friends, and the journalist resumed in his gruff voice a conversation previously commenced:

"Yes, I saw his 'Dead Child!' Ah! the poor devil! What an ending!"

Fagerolles nudged Jory, and the latter, having caught sight of his two old comrades, immediately added:

"Ah! that dear old Claude! How goes it, eh? You know that I haven't yet seen your picture. But I'm told that it's superb."

"Superb!" declared Fagerolles, who then began to express his surprise. "So you lunched here! What an idea! Everything is so awfully bad. We two have just come from Ledoyen's. Oh! such a crowd, such a hustling, such mirth! Bring your table nearer and let us chat a bit."

They joined the two tables together. But flatterers and petitioners were already after the triumphant young

master. Three friends rose up and noisily saluted him from afar. A lady became smilingly contemplative when her husband had whispered his name in her ear. And the tall, thin fellow, the artist whose picture had been badly hung, and who had pursued him since the morning, as enraged as ever, left a table where he was seated at the further end of the buffet, and again hurried forward to complain, imperatively demanding "the line" at once.

"Oh! go to the deuce!" cried Fagerolles at last, his patience and amiability exhausted. And he added, when the other had gone off, mumbling some indistinct threats: "It's true; a fellow does all he can to be obliging, but those chaps would drive one mad! All of them on the 'line!' leagues of 'line' then! Ah! what a business it is to be a committee-man! You wear out your legs, and only reap hatred as your reward!"

Claude, who was looking at him, with his oppressed air, seemed to wake up for a moment and murmured:

"I wrote to you; I wanted to go and see you to thank you. Bongrand told me about all the trouble you had. So thanks again."

But Fagerolles hastily broke in:

"Tut! tut! I certainly owed that much to our old friendship. It's I who am delighted to have given you any pleasure."

He showed the embarrassment which always seized hold of him in presence of the acknowledged master of his youth, that kind of humility which came perforce upon him when he was with the man whose mute disdain, even at this moment, sufficed to spoil all his triumph.

"Your picture is very good," slowly added Claude, who wished to be kind-hearted and generous.

This simple praise made Fagerolles' heart swell with exaggerated, irresistible emotion, springing he knew not whence; and this fellow, who believed in nothing, who

was usually so proficient in humbug, answered in a shaky voice:

"Ah! my dear fellow, ah! it's very kind of you to tell me that!"

Sandoz had at last obtained two cups of coffee, and as the waiter had forgotten to bring any sugar, he had to content himself with some bits which a party had left on a table near by. A few tables had now become vacant, but the general freedom had increased, and one woman's laughter rang out so loud that every head turned round. The men were smoking, and a bluish cloud slowly rose above the straggling tablecloths, stained by wine, and littered with dirty plates and dishes. When Fagerolles, on his side, succeeded in obtaining two glasses of Chartreuse for himself and Jory, he began to talk to Sandoz, whom he treated with a certain amount of deference, divining that the novelist might become a power. And Jory thereupon appropriated Claude, who had again become mournful and silent.

"You know, my dear fellow," said the journalist, "I didn't send you any announcement of my marriage. On account of our position we managed it on the quiet without any guests. All the same, I should have liked to let you know. You will excuse me, won't you?"

He showed himself expansive, gave particulars, happy to be alive, and egotistically delighted to feel fat and victorious in front of this poor, vanquished fellow. He succeeded with everything, he said. He had given up leader-writing, feeling the necessity of settling down seriously, and he had risen to the editorship of a prominent art review, on which, so it was asserted, he made thirty thousand francs a year, without mentioning certain profits realized by shady trafficking in the sale of art collections. The middle-class rapacity which he had inherited from his mother, the hereditary passion for profit which had secretly impelled him to embark in petty speculations as soon as he had made a few coppers,

now openly displayed itself, and had ended by making him a terrible customer who bled all the artists and amateurs who came under his clutches.

And it was amidst this good luck of his that Mathilde, now all powerful, had brought him to the point of begging her, with tears in his eyes, to become his wife, a request which she had proudly refused during six months.

"When folks are destined to live together," he continued, "the best course is to set everything square. You experienced it yourself, my dear fellow; you know something about it, eh? And if I told you that she wouldn't consent at first—yes, it's a fact—for fear of being badly judged and doing me harm! Oh! she has such a grandeur, such a delicacy of mind! No, no one can have an idea of that woman's qualities! Devoted, taking all possible care of you, economical, and acute, and a good adviser! Ah! it was a lucky chance that I met her! I no longer do anything without consulting her; I let her do as she likes; she manages everything, upon my word!"

The truth was that Mathilde had finished by reducing him to the frightened obedience of a little boy, who becomes "good" at the mere threat that he sha'n't have any jam. The once dissolute she-ghoul had become a dictatorial spouse, eager for respect, and consumed with ambition and love of money. She did not even play him false, but showed the sourish virtues of an honest woman. It was said that they had been seen together taking the Holy Communion at Notre Dame de Lorette. They kissed one another before other people, and called each other by endearing nicknames. Only, of an evening, he had to relate how he had spent his time during the day, and if the employment of a single hour remained suspicious, if he did not bring home all the sums he had received, down to the odd coppers, she made him spend such a night, threatening him with

grievous illnesses, that on each occasion he paid a dearer price for her forgiveness.

"And so," repeated Jory, who took a pleasure in relating his story, "we waited for my father's death, and then I married her."

Claude, whose mind had so far been wandering, and who had merely nodded his head without listening, was struck by this last sentence.

"What! you married her—married Mathilde?"

This exclamation resumed all the astonishment that the affair caused him, all the recollections that had occurred to him of Mahoudeau's shop. That Jory, why, he could still hear him talking about her in abominable terms; he remembered his confidential revelations one morning on the foot-pavement; Roman orgies, horrors in the depths of the herb-shop, reeking with the strong smell of aromatic plants. All the band had passed through it. Jory had shown himself even more insulting than the others, and yet he had married her! It was really stupid for a fellow to speak badly of a woman, as he never knew if he wouldn't end by marrying her some day or other!

"Why, yes, Mathilde," replied Jory, smiling. "Oh, those old creatures! they make the best wives after all!"

He was perfectly serene, his memory dead, not allowing himself an allusion, not showing the least embarrassment when his comrades' eyes were on him. Besides, she seemed to be a new comer, and he introduced her to them as if they were not as well acquainted with her as he was.

Sandoz, who had lent an ear to the conversation, greatly interested by this fine business, called out as soon as Jory and Claude became silent:

"Let's be off, eh? My legs are getting numbed."

But at this moment Irma Bécot appeared, and stopped in front of the buffet. With her hair freshly gilded

she had assumed her best looks; all the tricky sheen of a tawny woman, who seemed to have just stepped out of some old Renaissance frame: and she wore a train of light blue brocaded silk, over a satin skirt covered with Alençon lace, of such richness that quite an escort of gentlemen followed her in admiration. On perceiving Claude among the others, she hesitated for a moment, seized, as it were, with cowardly shame in front of this ill-clad, ugly, derided devil. Then, becoming valiant with her old whim, as it were, it was his hand that she shook the first, amid all these well-dressed men, who opened their eyes in amazement. She laughed with an affectionate air, with friendly banter, which slightly puckered up the corners of her mouth.

"Without malice," she gayly said to Claude.

And this remark, which they alone understood, made her laugh all the more. It resumed their story. The poor fellow whom she had had to carry off perforce, and who hadn't even been pleased with her for doing so.

Fagerolles, who was already paying for the two Chartreuses, went off with Irma, whom Jory also decided to follow. Claude watched them go off together, she between the two men, walking in regal fashion, greatly admired, and repeatedly bowed to, through the crowd.

"One can see very well that Mathilde isn't here," said Sandoz, quietly. "Ah! my friends, what clouts Jory would receive on getting home."

The novelist now asked for the bill. All the tables were becoming vacant, there only remained a litter of bones and crusts. A couple of waiters were wiping the marble slabs with sponges, whilst a third was raking the sand, moist and soiled with crumbs. Behind the brown serge hangings, the staff of the establishment was lunching—there was a noise of jaws moving, clammy laughter, all the powerful mastication of a camp of gipsies swallowing the contents of their saucepans.

Claude and Sandoz went round the garden, and they

discovered a statue by Mahoudeau, very badly placed in a corner near the eastern vestibule. It was the bathing girl at last, standing erect, but of diminutive proportions, being scarcely as tall as a girl ten years old, but charmingly delicate—with slim hips, and a tiny bosom, displaying all the exquisite hesitancy of a sprouting bud. The figure seemed to exhale a perfume, that grace which nothing imparts, but which flowers where it pleases, obstinate, invincible, perennial grace, springing still and ever from those thick workman's fingers, so ignorant of their special aptitude that they had long treated this very grace with derision.

Sandoz could not help smiling.

"And to think that this fellow has done everything he could to warp his talent. If his figure were better placed, it would meet with great success."

"Yes, great success," repeated Claude. "It is very pretty."

Precisely at that moment, they perceived Mahoudeau, already in the vestibule, and going towards the staircase. They called him, ran after him, and then all three remained together for a few minutes, talking. The ground-floor gallery stretched away, empty, with a sanded pavement, and a pale light streaming through its large round windows; and you might have fancied yourself under a railway bridge. Strong pillars supported the metallic framework; an icy chillness blew down from above, moistening the sand in which your feet sank. In the distance, behind a torn curtain, you could see rows of statues, the rejected sculptural exhibits, the casts which poor sculptors did not even remove, gathered together in a livid kind of Morgue, in a state of lamentable abandonment. But what surprised one, on raising one's head, was the continuous din, the mighty tramp of the public over the flooring of the galleries. You were deafened by it; it rolled on indefinitely, as if intermina-

ble trains, going at full speed, were endlessly shaking the iron girders.

When Mahoudeau had been complimented, he told Claude that he had searched for his picture in vain; in the depths of what hole could they have shoved it? Then in a fit of affection for the past, he anxiously asked after Gagnière and Dubuche. Where were the Salons of yore, which they had all reached in a band, the mad excursions through the galleries as in an enemy's country, the violent disdain on going away, the discussions which had made one's tongue swell, and emptied one's brain! Nobody now saw Dubuche. Two or three times a month Gagnière came from Melun, in a state of distraction, to attend some concert; and he now took such little interest in painting that he had not even come to the Salon, although he exhibited his usual landscape, the same view of the banks of the Seine, which he had been sending for fifteen years, of a pretty grayish tint, and so conscientious and quiet that the public had never remarked it.

"I was going up-stairs," resumed Mahoudeau. "Will you come up with me?"

Claude, pale with suffering, raised his eyes every second. Ah! that terrible rumbling, that devouring gallop of the monster overhead, the shock of which he felt in his very limbs.

He held out his hand without speaking.

"What! Are you going to leave us?" exclaimed Sandoz. "Take just another turn with us, and we'll go away together."

Then on seeing Claude so weary, a feeling of pity made his heart contract. He divined that the poor fellow's courage was exhausted, that he was desirous of solitude, seized with a desire to fly off alone and hide his wound.

"Then, good-bye, old man. I'll call and see you to-morrow."

Staggering and as if pursued by the tempest of up-stairs, Claude disappeared behind the clumps of shrubbery in the garden. But two hours later, Sandoz, who after losing Mahoudeau had just found him again with Jory and Fagerolles, perceived the painter once more standing in front of his picture, at the same spot where he had met him the first time. At the moment of going off the wretched fellow had come up there again, harassed and attracted despite himself.

There was now the usual five o'clock heated crush. The crowd, weary of winding round the galleries, and seized with the vertigo of flocks let free in a fold, became distracted, and pushed and shoved, crushing one another without finding the way out. Since the coolness of the morning, the heat of the human bodies, the odor of the breath, had made the atmosphere heavy with a ruddy vapor; and the dust of the floors, flying about, rose up in a fine mist amid all the exhalations. People still took each other to see certain pictures, the subjects of which alone struck and attracted the crowd. People went off, came back, and walked about unceasingly. The women were particularly obstinate in not retiring; they seemed determined to remain there till the attendants pushed them outside when six o'clock began to strike. Some fat ladies had foundered. Others, who had failed to find the tiniest place to sit down on, leaned heavily on their parasols, sinking, but still obstinate. Every eye anxiously and supplicatingly watched the settees loaded with people. And all that these thousands of sight-seers were now conscious of was this last stroke of fatigue, which made their legs totter, drew their features together, and tortured their foreheads with headache, that special headache of the Salon, caused by the constant straining of the neck, and the blinding dance of colors.

Alone, on the little settee, where at noon already they had been talking about their private affairs, the two

decorated gentlemen were still quietly chatting with their minds a hundred leagues away. Perhaps they had returned there, perhaps they had not even budged from the spot.

"And so," said the fat one, "you went in, pretending not to understand?"

"Quite so," replied the thin one. "I looked at them and took off my hat. It was clear, eh?"

"Astonishing, you are really astonishing, my dear friend."

Claude, however, only heard the low beating of his heart, and only beheld the "Dead Child" up there in the air, near the ceiling. He did not take his eye off it, a prey to the fascination which held him there, quite independent of his will. The crowd turned round him in its nauseous lassitude, people's feet trod on his, he was shoved against, carried away; and like some inert object he abandoned himself, waved about, and ultimately found himself again at the same spot without having once lowered his head, quite ignorant of what was transpiring below, and with all his life concentrated up there beside his work, his little Jacques, swollen in death. Two big tears stood motionless between his eyelids, preventing him from seeing clearly. And it seemed to him as if he would never have time to see enough.

Then Sandoz, in his profound compassion, pretended not to see his old friend, as if he wished to leave him there, beside the tomb of his miscarried life. The comrades once more went past in a band. Fagerolles and Jory darted on ahead, and Mahoudeau, having asked Sandoz where Claude's picture was hung, the novelist told a lie, drew him aside and took him off. They all of them went away.

In the evening Christine only managed to draw curt words from Claude; everything was going on all right, he said; the public showed no ill humor; the picture had a good effect, though it was hung perhaps rather

high up. However, despite this semblance of cold tranquillity, he was so strange that she became frightened.

After dinner, as she returned from carrying the dirty plates into the kitchen, she no longer found him near the table. He had opened a window which overlooked some waste ground and he stood there, leaning out to such a degree that she was unable to see him. Then, terrified, she sprang forward and pulled him violently by his jacket.

"Claude! Claude! what are you doing?"

He turned round, as white as a sheet and with haggard eyes.

"I'm looking."

But she closed the window with her trembling hands, and after that such anguish clung to her that she no longer slept at night-time.

CHAPTER XI.

A FINAL SPLITTING UP.

CLAUDE set to work again on the very next day and the time elapsed, the whole summer went by in heavy quietude. He had found a job, some little paintings of flowers for England, the proceeds of which sufficed for their daily bread. All his available time was again devoted to the large canvas, and he no longer went into the same fits of anger over it, but seemed to resign himself to this eternal task, looking calm, and showing obstinate, hopeless industry. However, his eyes retained their mad expression, one saw the death of light, as it were, in them, when they gazed on the miscarried work of his existence.

At about this period Sandoz, also, experienced great grief. His mother died, his whole life was upset, that life of three together, so homely in its character, and shared merely by a few friends. He began to hate the pavilion of the Rue Nollet, and, moreover, success suddenly declared itself as regards his books, which hitherto had sold but moderately well. So, gratified by the advent of this wealth, he rented in the Rue de Londres a spacious flat, the arrangement of which occupied him and his wife for several months. Sandoz's grief had drawn him closer to Claude again, both being disgusted with everything. After the terrible blow of the Salon, the novelist had been anxious about his old chum, divining that something had irreparably snapped within him, that there was some wound by which life ebbed away

unseen. Then, seeing Claude become so cold and quiet, he had ended by growing somewhat reassured.

Sandoz often walked up to the Rue Tourlaque, and whenever it happened that he found only Christine at home, he questioned her, realizing that she, also, lived in apprehension of a calamity of which she never spoke. Her face bore a look of worry, and now and anon she started nervously like a mother who watches over her child, and trembles at the slightest sound, with the fear that death may be entering the chamber.

One July morning Sandoz asked her: "Well, are you pleased? Claude's quiet, he works a deal."

She gave the large picture her usual glance, a side one full of terror and hatred.

"Yes, yes, he works," she said. "He wants to finish everything else before taking up the woman again." And without confessing the fear that harassed her, she added in a lower tone: "But his eyes—have you noticed his eyes? They always have the same wild expression. I know very well that he lies, despite his pretence of taking things so easily. Pray, come and see him, and take him out with you, so as to change the current of his thoughts. He only has you left; help me, do help me!"

After that Sandoz diligently devised motives for walks, arrived at Claude's early in the morning, and carried him away from his work perforce. It was almost always necessary to drag him from his steps, on which he habitually sat, even when he was not painting. A feeling of weariness stopped him, a kind of torpor benumbed him for long minutes without his giving a single stroke with the brush. In these moments of mute contemplation, his gaze reverted with pious fervor to the woman's figure which he no longer touched: it was like a hesitating desire for voluptuousness which was bound to bring death with it—an infinite tenderness combined with the sacred fright of a passion, which he refused to satisfy, as he was

certain that it would cost him his life. Then he set to work again at the other figures and the background of the picture, knowing, however, that the woman's figure was still there; and his glance wavered whenever he espied it; he felt he would only remain master of himself as long as he did not touch her flesh again, and she did not clasp him in her arms.

One evening, Christine, who now visited at Sandoz's, and never missed a single Thursday there, in the hope of seeing her big sick child of an artist brighten up in the society of his friends, took the novelist aside, begging him to drop in at their place on the morrow. And on the next day Sandoz, who, as it happened, precisely wanted to take some notes for a novel, on the other side of Montmartre, went in search of Claude, took him off and kept him idling about until night-time.

On this occasion they went as far as the gate of Clignancourt, where a perpetual fair was held, with merry-go-rounds, shooting-galleries, and drinking-gardens, and on reaching the spot they were stupefied to find themselves face to face with Chaîne, who was enthroned in the centre of a vast and stylish booth. It was a kind of chapel, highly ornamented; four circular revolving stands were set in a row, loaded with articles in china and glass, all sorts of nick-nacks, the gilding and varnish of which shone in lightning fashion amid an harmonica-like tinkling, whenever the hand of any gamester set the stand in motion. It then swept round, grating against a feather which, on the rotatory movement ceasing, indicated what article, if any, had been won. The big prize was a live rabbit, adorned with pink favors, which waltzed and revolved unceasingly, intoxicated with fright. And all this display was set in red hangings, scalloped at the top, curtains between which one saw three pictures hanging at the rear of the shop, as in the sanctuary of some tabernacle. They were Chaîne's three masterpieces, which followed him from fair to fair, from one end of Paris to the

other. The "Woman taken in Adultery" in the centre, the copy of the Mantegna on the left, Mahoudeau's stove on the right. Of an evening when the petroleum lamps were flaming, and the revolving stands burned and radiated like planets, nothing seemed finer than these pictures hanging amid the blood-tinged purple of the hangings; and so the gaping crowd often flocked there.

The sight was such that it wrung an exclamation from Claude: "Ah, good heavens! But those paintings look very well—they were intended for this."

The Mantegna, so naïvely hard in treatment, looked like some faded colored print nailed there for the delectation of simple-minded folks; whilst the minutely painted stove, all awry, hanging beside the gingerbread Christ absolving the adulterous woman, assumed an unexpectedly gay aspect.

However, Chaîne, who had just perceived the two friends, held out his hand to them, as if he had left them merely the day before. He was calm, neither proud nor ashamed of his shop, and he had not aged, still having a leathery aspect, though on the other hand his nose had completely vanished between his cheeks, whilst his mouth, clammy with prolonged silence, was buried in his beard.

"Hallo! so we meet again!" said Sandoz, gayly. "Do you know your paintings have a lot of effect?"

"The old humbug!" added Claude. "Why he has his little Salon all to himself. That's very cute, indeed."

Chaîne's face became radiant, and he dropped the remark: "Of course!"

Then, as his artistic pride was roused, he, from whom people barely wrung anything but growls, articulated a complete sentence:

"Ah! it's quite certain that if I had any money like you fellows, I should make my way just as you have done, in spite of everything."

That was his conviction. He had never doubted his

talent, he had simply forsaken the profession because it didn't feed him. In the Louvre, at sight of the masterpieces hanging there, he was convinced that time alone was necessary to turn out similar work.

"Ah, me!" said Claude, who had become gloomy again. "Don't regret what you've done; you alone have succeeded. Business is brisk, eh?"

But Chaîne muttered bitter words. No, no, there was nothing doing, not even in his line. People wouldn't play for prizes; all the money found its way to the wine-shops. In spite of buying paltry odds and ends, and striking the table with the palm of one's hand, so that the feather might not indicate one of the big prizes, a fellow barely had water to drink nowadays. Then, as some people had drawn near, he stopped short in his explanation and cried out: "Walk up, walk up, at every turn you win!"—in a gruff voice, which the two others had never known him to possess, and which fairly stupefied them.

A workman who was carrying a sickly little girl with large covetous eyes, let her play two turns. The revolving stands grated, the nick-nacks danced round in dazzling fashion, while the live rabbit, with his ears lowered, revolved and revolved so rapidly that the outline of his body vanished and he became nothing but a whitish circle. There was a moment of great emotion, for the little girl had narrowly missed winning him.

Then, after shaking hands with Chaîne, who was still trembling with the fright he had had, the two friends walked away.

"He's happy," said Claude, after they had gone some fifty paces in silence.

"He!" cried Sandoz, "why, he believes he has missed becoming a member of the Institute, and it's killing him."

Shortly after this meeting, and towards the middle of August, Sandoz hit upon the diversion of a real journey,

a complete excursion which would take up a whole day. He had met Dubuche—Dubuche, careworn and mournful, who had shown himself plaintive and affectionate, raking up the past, inviting his two old chums to lunch at La Richaudière, where he should be alone with his two children for another fortnight. Why shouldn't they go and surprise him since he seemed so desirous of renewing the old intimacy? But in vain did Sandoz repeat that he had promised Dubuche on oath to bring Claude with him; the painter obstinately refused to go, as if he were frightened at the idea of again beholding Bennecourt, the Seine, the islands, all the stretch of country where his happy years lay dead and buried. It was necessary for Christine to interfere, and he finished by giving way, although full of repugnance. It precisely happened that on the day prior to the appointment, he had worked at his painting until very late, being taken with the old fever again. And so the next morning—it was Sunday—being devoured with a longing to paint, he went off most reluctantly, tearing himself away from his picture with a pang. What was the use of returning to Bennecourt? All that was dead, it no longer existed. Paris alone existed, and even in Paris there was but one view, the point of La Cité, that vision which haunted him always and everywhere, that one corner where he left his heart.

Sandoz, finding him nervous in the railway carriage with his eyes fixed on the window as if he had been leaving the city—which had gradually grown smaller and seemed shrouded in mist—for years, did all he could to divert his mind, and told him what he knew about Dubuche's real position. At the outset, old Margaillan, glorifying in his be-medalled son-in-law, had trotted him about and introduced him everywhere as his partner and successor. There was a fellow who would conduct business briskly, who would build more cheaply and in finer style, for he had grown pale over books! However,

Dubuche's first idea was disastrous; on some land belonging to his father-in-law in Burgundy he established a brickyard in so unfavorable a situation, and after so defective a plan, that the venture resulted in the sheer loss of two hundred thousand francs. Then he turned his attention to erecting houses, insisting upon bringing personal ideas into execution, a well-matured general scheme which would revolutionize the building art. These ideas of his were the old theories he held from the revolutionary chums of his youth, everything that he had promised he would realize when he was free; but he had not properly reduced the theories to method, and he applied them unseasonably, with the heaviness of a good pupil lacking the sacred fire; he experimented with terra cotta and pottery ornamentation, large bay windows, and especially with the employment of iron—iron girders, iron staircases, iron roofings; and as these materials increased the expense, he again ended with a catastrophe, which was all the greater as he was a pitiful manager, and was losing his head since he had become rich, rendered more obtuse as it were by money, quite spoilt and at sea, unable even to return to his old habits of industry. This time Margaillan grew angry; he who for thirty years had been buying ground, building and selling again, estimating at a glance the cost and return of house property; so many yards of building at so much the yard having to yield so many suites of rooms, at so much rent. He wouldn't have anything more to do with a fellow who blundered about lime, bricks, millstones, everything, who employed oak when deal would have done, and who couldn't bring himself to cut up a story—like a consecrated wafer—into as many little squares as was necessary. No, no, none of that! He rebelled against art, after having been ambitious to introduce a little of it into his routine, to satisfy a long-standing worry about his own ignorance. And after that, matters had gone from bad to worse, terrible

quarrels had broken out between the son-in-law and the father-in-law, the former disdainful, intrenching himself behind his science, the latter shouting that the commonest laborer knew more than an architect did. The millions were in danger, and one fine day Margaillan turned Dubuche out of his offices, forbidding him ever to set foot in them again, since he didn't even know how to direct a building-yard where only four men worked. It was a disaster, a lamentable failure, the School of Arts collapsing, derided by a mason!

At this point of Sandoz's story, Claude, who had begun to listen to his friend, inquired:

"Then, what is Dubuche doing now?"

"I don't know—nothing, probably," answered Sandoz. "He told me that he was anxious about his children's health, and was taking care of them."

That pale woman, Madame Margaillan, as slender as the blade of a knife, had died of tubercular consumption, which was plainly the hereditary disease, the source of the family's degeneracy, for her daughter Régine had been coughing since her marriage. At this moment she was drinking the waters at Mont-Doré, where she had not dared to take her children, as they had been very poorly the year before, after a season spent in that part, where the air was too keen for their debility. This explained the scattering of the family: the mother over there with her maid; the grandfather in Paris, where he had resumed his great building enterprises, battling amid his four hundred workmen, and crushing the idle and the incapable beneath his contempt; and the father in exile at La Richaudière, set to watch over his daughter and son, shut up there, after the very first struggle, as if it had broken him down for life. In a moment of effusion, Dubuche had even let Sandoz understand that his wife had almost died and was extremely delicate.

"A nice marriage," said Sandoz, by way of conclusion.

It was ten o'clock when the two friends rang at the iron gate of La Richaudière. The estate, with which they were not acquainted, amazed them: a superb park, a garden laid out in the French style with balustrades and steps spreading away in regal fashion, three vast conservatories and a colossal cascade, quite a piece of folly, with its rocks brought from afar, and the quantity of cement and the number of conduits that had been employed; indeed the owner had sunk a fortune in it, out of sheer vanity. But what struck the friends still more was the melancholy, deserted aspect of the domain, the gravel of the avenues carefully raked, with not a trace of footsteps; the distant expanses quite deserted save that now and then a solitary gardener passed by; the house looking dead with all its windows closed, with the exception of two which were barely set ajar.

However, a valet, who had decided to show himself, began to question them, and when he learnt that they wished to see "monsieur," he became insolent, and replied that "monsieur" was behind the house at the gymnasium, and then went in-doors again.

Sandoz and Claude followed a path which led them towards a lawn, and what they saw there made them pause for a moment. Dubuche, who stood in front of a trapeze, was raising his arms to support his son Gaston, a poor sickly boy, who, at ten years of age, still had the slight, soft limbs of early childhood; while the girl Alice was seated in a perambulator, awaiting her turn. Prematurely born, she was so imperfectly developed that, although six years old, she was not yet able to walk. The father, absorbed in his task, continued exercising the slim limbs of his little boy, swinging him backwards and forwards, and vainly tried to make him raise himself up with his wrists. Then, as this slight effort sufficed to bring on a perspiration, he took the little chap down from the trapeze and rolled him in a rug: all amid complete silence, alone under the far

expanse of sky, having a look of distressful pity as he knelt there in this splendid park. However, as he rose up, he perceived the two friends.

"What? it's you! On a Sunday, and without warning me!"

He had made a gesture of annoyance, and he at once explained that the maid, the only woman to whom he could trust the children, went to Paris on Sundays, and that it was consequently impossible for him to leave Gaston and Alice for a minute.

"I bet you came to lunch?" he added.

As Claude gave Sandoz an imploring glance, the novelist made haste to answer:

"No, no. As it happens we only have time enough to shake hands with you. Claude had to come down here on a business matter. He lived at Bennecourt, as you know. And as I accompanied him, we took it into our heads to walk on as far as here. But there are people waiting for us, so don't disturb yourself in the least."

Thereupon, Dubuche, who felt relieved, made a show of detaining them. They certainly had an hour to spare, dash it all! And they all three began to talk. Claude looked at Dubuche, astonished to find him so aged; his flabby face had become wrinkled, it was of a yellow tint, streaked with red, as if bile had splashed his skin; whilst his hair and his moustach were already growing gray. In addition, his figure appeared to have become more compact; a bitter weariness made each of his gestures seem an effort. Were defeats in money matters as hard to bear, then, as defeats in art? Everything about this vanquished man, his voice, his glance, proclaimed the shameful dependency in which he had to live—the bankruptcy of his future which was cast in his teeth, the constant charge of having allowed a talent which he did not possess to be inscribed in the marriage-contract, the money of the family which he now-a-days stole with what he eat, the clothes he wore, and the

pocket money he needed; in fact, the perpetual alms which were bestowed upon him, just as they might have been bestowed upon some vulgar swindler, whom one couldn't get rid of.

"Wait for me," resumed Dubuche; "I have to stop here five minutes longer with one of my poor duckies, and afterwards we'll go indoors."

Gently, and with infinite, motherly precautions, he removed little Alice from the perambulator, and lifted her to the trapeze; and then, stammering coaxing words and smiling, he encouraged her, and left her hanging for a couple of minutes, so as to develop her muscles; but he remained with open arms, watching each movement with the fear of seeing her smashed to pieces should fatigue make her weak little, wax-like hands relax their hold. She did not say anything, but obeyed him in spite of the terror that this exercise caused her; and she was so pitifully light in weight that she did not even fully stretch the ropes, being like one of those scraggy little birds which fall from a young shoot without as much as bending it.

At this moment, Dubuche, having given Gaston a glance, became distracted on remarking that the rug had slipped and that the child's legs were uncovered.

"Good heavens! good heavens! Why, he'll catch cold on this grass! And I, who can't move. Gaston, my little dear! It's the same thing every day; you wait till I'm occupied with your sister. Sandoz, pray, cover him! Ah! thanks; pull the rug up more, don't be afraid!"

This was what his splendid marriage had brought—these two incomplete little beings, whom the least breath from the sky threatened to kill like flies. Of the fortune he had married this was all that remained to him, the constant grief of seeing his blood become polluted, instilling pain in this lamentable son and daughter who would rotten his race, now fallen to the final degeneracy of scro-

fula and phthisis. And this big egotistical fellow had revealed himself as an admirable father, whose heart was inflamed by one passion alone. The only determination that remained to him was that he would make his children live, and he struggled on hour after hour, saving them every morning and dreading to lose them every night. They alone existed now amid his finished existence, amid the bitterness of his father-in-law's insulting reproaches, the dull days and the icy nights which his sorry wife had brought him; and he kept to his task in desperation, he finished bringing these children into the world, as it were, by a constant miracle of tenderness.

"There, my darling, that's enough, isn't it?" he said. "You'll see how you'll become big and pretty."

He then placed Alice in the perambulator again, took Gaston, who was still wrapped up, on one of his arms; and when his friends wished to help him, he declined their offer, impelling the little girl's vehicle with his right hand, which had remained free.

"Thanks," he said, "I'm accustomed to it. Ah! the poor darlings are not heavy; and, besides, with servants one can never be sure."

On entering the house Sandoz and Claude again saw the valet who had been so insolent; and they noticed that Dubuche trembled before him. The kitchen and the hall shared the contempt of the father-in-law, who paid for everything, and treated "madame's" husband like a beggar whose presence was merely tolerated out of charity. Each time that a shirt was got ready for him, each time that he asked for some more bread, the servants' impolite gestures made him feel that he was receiving alms.

"Well, good-bye, we must leave you," said Sandoz, who suffered at sight of all this.

"No, no, wait a bit. The children are going to breakfast, and afterwards I'll accompany you with them. They must go for their outing."

Each day was regulated hour by hour. Of a morning the baths, the gymnastics, then the breakfast which was quite an affair, as the children needed special food, duly discussed and weighed, and matters were carried to such a point that even their wine and water was made slightly warm, for fear that too chilly a drop might give them a cold. On this occasion they were each given the yolk of an egg diluted in some broth, and a mutton cutlet which the father cut up into tiny morsels. Then, prior to the siesta, came the promenade.

Sandoz and Claude found themselves once more out-of-doors, going along the broad avenues with Dubuche, who again impelled Alice's perambulator, whilst Gaston now walked beside him. They talked about the estate as they went towards the gate. The master glanced over the park with timid, nervous eyes, as if he had not felt himself at home. Besides, he did not know anything, he did not occupy himself about anything. He appeared to have forgotten even his architect's profession which he was accused of being ignorant of, he seemed to have gone astray, to be bowed bown by sheer inaction.

"And your parents, how are they?" asked Sandoz.

A flame was once more kindled in Dubuche's dim eyes.

"Oh! my parents are happy," he said. "I bought them a little house, where they live on the annuity which I had specified in my marriage-contract. Well, you see, mamma had advanced enough money for my education, and I had to return it all, as I had promised, eh? Yes, I can say that my parents have nothing to reproach me with."

Having reached the gate, they tarried there for a few minutes. At last, still looking crushed, Dubuche shook hands with his old comrades; and retaining Claude's hand in his, he concluded, as if making a simple statement of fact quite devoid of anger:

"Good-bye, try to get out of worry! As for me, I've spoilt my life."

And they watched him walk back towards the house, pushing the perambulator, and supporting Gaston who was already stumbling with fatigue—himself, Dubuche, with his back bent and the heavy tread of an old man.

One o'clock was striking, and they both hurried down towards Bennecourt, saddened and ravenous. But melancholiness awaited them there as well; a murderous wind had swept over the place, the Faucheurs, husband and wife, old Porrette, were all dead; and the inn, having fallen into the hands of that goose Mélie, was becoming repugnant with its filth and coarseness. They were served an abominable repast—hairs in the omelette, cutlets smelling of grease—in the centre of the common room, where an open window admitted the pestilential odor and which was so full of flies that they positively blackened the tables. The heat of the burning afternoon came in with the stench, and Claude and Sandoz did not even feel the courage to order any coffee; they fled.

"And you who used to extol old Mother Faucheur's omelettes," said Sandoz. "The place is done for. We are going for a turn, eh?"

Claude was inclined to refuse. Since the morning he had had but one idea, of walking on as fast as possible, as if each step shortened the disagreeable task and brought him back towards Paris. His heart, his head, his whole being had remained there. He looked neither to right nor to left, gliding along without distinguishing aught of the fields or the trees, having but one fixed idea under his skull, and a prey to such hallucinations that at certain moments he fancied that the point of La Cité rose up and called to him amid the vast expanse of stubble. However, Sandoz's proposal aroused memories within him; and, softening somewhat, he replied:

"Yes, that's it, we'll have a look."

But, as they advanced along the river bank, he became indignant and grieved. He could scarcely recognize the place. A bridge had been built to connect Bennecourt

with Bonnières: a bridge, good heavens! in the place of that old ferry-boat, grating against its chain, and the black form of which, cutting athwart the current, had been so full of interest to the artistic eye. Moreover, the dam established down stream at Port-Villez had raised the level of the river, most of the islands were submerged, and the little armlets of the stream had become broader. There were no more pretty nooks, no more rippling alleys amid which one could lose one's self; it was a disaster to make one inclined to strangle all the river engineers!

"Why, that clump of pollards still emerging from the water on the left," cried Claude, "was the Barreux island where we used to chat together, lying down on the grass, you remember? Ah! the scoundrels!"

Sandoz, who could never see a tree felled without shaking his fist at the wood-cutter, turned pale with the same anger, and felt exasperated that the authorities had thus dared to mutilate nature.

Then, as Claude approached his old home, he became silent, with his teeth clenched. The house had been sold to some middle-class people, and now there was an iron gate, against which he pressed his face. The rose bushes were all dead, the apricot trees were dead also, the garden, which looked very trim, with its little pathways and its square cut beds of flowers and vegetables, bordered with box, was reflected in a large ball of plated glass set on a stand right in the centre; and the house, newly white-washed, painted at the corners, and round the doors and windows, so as to imitate free stone, seemed like some clownish parvenu awkwardly arrayed in his Sunday toggery—a sight which fairly enraged the painter. No, no, nothing of himself, nothing of Christine, nothing of the great love of their youth remained there. He wished to look still further; he turned round behind the house, and sought for the copse of oak trees where they had left the living quiver of their life; but the copse

was dead, dead like all the rest, felled, sold and burnt. Then he made an anathematizing gesture, in which he threw all his grief to this stretch of country which was now so changed that he could not find there one single token of his life. And so a few years sufficed to efface the spot where one had labored, tasted enjoyment and suffered? What was the use of vain agitation if the wind, behind advancing man, swept and carried away all the traces of his footsteps? He had rightly realized that he ought not to return there, for the past is but the cemetery of our illusions, where our feet forever stumble against tombstones.

"Let us go," he cried; "let us go at once! It's stupid to torture one's heart like this!"

When they were on the new bridge, Sandoz tried to calm him by showing him the view which had not formerly existed, the widened bed of the Seine full to the brim as it were, and the water flowing onward, proudly slow. But this water failed to interest Claude any longer, until he reflected that it was the same water which, as it passed through Paris, had bathed the old quay walls of the Cité; and then he was touched, he leant over the parapet of the bridge for a moment, and thought he could distinguish glorious reflections in the water, the towers of Notre-Dame, and the needle-like spire of the Sainte Chapelle being carried along by the current towards the sea.

The two friends missed the three o'clock train, and it was real torture to have to spend two long hours more in this neighborhood, where everything seemed to weigh so heavily on their shoulders. Fortunately, they had forewarned Christine and Madame Sandoz that they might return by a night train if they were detained. So they resolved upon a bachelor dinner at a restaurant on the Place du Hâvre, to try and set themselves all right again by a good chat at dessert as in former times.

Eight o'clock was about to strike when they sat down to table.

Claude, on leaving the terminus, with his feet once more on the Paris pavement, had lost his nervous agitation, like a man who at last finds himself once more at home. And with the cold, absorbed air which he now generally retained, he listened to the chatter of Sandoz trying to enliven him. The novelist treated his friend like a woman whose head he wished to turn; they partook of delicate, highly spiced dishes and heady wines. But mirth was rebellious, and Sandoz himself ended by becoming gloomy. All his hopes of immortality were shaken by this excursion to that ungrateful country village, that Bennecourt, so loved and so forgetful, where they had not found as much as a stone retaining any recollection of them. If things which are eternal forgot so soon, could one place any reliance for one hour on the memory of man?

"Do you know, old fellow," said the novelist, "it's that which sometimes sends me into a cold sweat. Have you ever reflected that posterity may not be the impeccable meter-out of justice whom we dream of? One consoles one's self for being insulted and denied by relying on the equity of centuries to come; just like the faithful who endure all the abominations of this earth in the firm belief of another life in which each one will be treated according to his deserts. But suppose paradise no more exists for the artist than it does for the catholic, suppose that future generations prolonged the misunderstanding and preferred amiable little trifles to vigorous works! Ah! what a sell it would be, eh? To have led a convict's life—screwed down to work—all for a mere chimera! Please notice that it's quite possible after all. There are some consecrated reputations which I wouldn't give a rap for. Classical education has deformed everything, and has imposed upon us as geniuses fellows of facile talent who followed the beaten track; but to them

one may prefer men of free tendencies, whose work is at times unequal. They are only known, however, to a few people of real culture, so that it looks as if immortality might really go merely to the middle-class 'average' talent, to the men whose names are forced into our brains at school when we are not strong enough to defend ourselves. But no, no, one mustn't say these things; they make me shudder! Should I have the courage to go on with my task, should I be able to remain erect amid all the jeering, if I hadn't the consoling illusion that I shall some day be appreciated!"

Claude had listened with his air of suffering, and he now made a gesture of indifference tinged with bitterness.

"Bah! what does it matter? Well, there's nothing hereafter. We are even madder than the fools who kill themselves for a woman. When the earth splits to pieces in space like a dry walnut, our works won't add one atom to its dust."

"That's quite true," summed up Sandoz, who was very pale. "What's the use of trying to fill up the void of space? And to think that we know it, and that our pride still battles all the same!"

They left the restaurant, roamed about the streets and foundered again in the depths of a café where they philosophized. They had come by degrees to raking up the memories of their childhood, and this ended by filling their hearts with sadness. One o'clock in the morning struck when they decided to go home.

However, Sandoz talked of seeing Claude as far as the Rue Tourlaque. This August night was a superb one, the air warm, the sky studded with stars. And as they went the round by way of the Quartier de l'Europe, they passed before the old Café Baudequin on the Boulevard des Batignolles. It had changed hands three times; it was no longer arranged in the same manner inside; there were now a couple of billiard tables on the right hand;

and several strata of customers had followed each other there, one covering the other, so that the old frequenters had disappeared like buried nations. However, curiosity, the emotion they had derived from all the dead things they had been raking up together, induced them to cross the boulevard and to glance into the café through the open doorway. They wanted to see their table of yore, on the left hand, right at the back of the room.

"Oh, look!" said Sandoz, stupefied.

"Gagnière!" muttered Claude.

It was, indeed, Gagnière seated all alone at that table, at the end of the empty café. He must have come from Melun for one of those Sunday concerts to which he treated himself; and then, in the evening, while he was astray in Paris, an old habit of his legs had led him up to the Café Baudequin. Not one of the comrades ever set foot there now, and he, who had beheld another age, obstinately remained there alone. He had not yet touched his glass of beer; he was looking at it, so absorbed in thought that he did not even stir when the waiters began piling the chairs on the tables so that everything might be ready for the morrow's sweeping.

The two friends hurried off, upset by the sight of this vague figure, and seized, as it were, with a childish fear of ghosts. They parted in the Rue Tourlaque.

"Ah! that poor devil, Dubuche!" said Sandoz, as he pressed Claude's hand, "he spoilt our day for us."

As soon as November had come round, and when all the old friends were back in Paris again, Sandoz thought of gathering them together at one of those Thursday dinners which had remained a habit with him. They were always his greatest delight; the sale of his books was increasing and he was growing rich; the flat in the Rue de Londres was becoming quite luxurious compared with the little house at Batignolles; but he himself remained immutable. On this occasion, he was anxious, in his good nature, to procure real enjoyment for Claude

by organizing one of the dear evenings of their youth. So he saw to the invitations; Claude and Christine naturally; Jory and his wife, the latter of whom it had been necessary to receive since her marriage; then Dubuche who always came alone, with Fagerolles, Mahoudeau, and finally Gagnière. There would be ten of them; all the men comrades of the old band, without a single outsider, so that the good understanding and jollity might be complete.

Henriette, who was more mistrustful than her husband, hesitated when this list of guests was decided on.

"Oh! Fagerolles? You believe in having Fagerolles with the others? They hardly like him—nor Claude either; I fancied I noticed a coolness—"

But he interrupted her, bent on not admitting it.

"What! a coolness? It's really funny, but women can't understand that fellows chaff each other. That doesn't prevent them, however, from having their hearts in the right place."

Henriette took especial care in preparing the menu for that Thursday dinner. She now had quite a little staff to overlook, a cook, a man-servant, and so on; and if she no longer prepared any of the dishes herself, she still saw that very delicate fare was provided out of affection for her husband whose only vice was gluttony. She went to market with the cook and called in person on the tradespeople. She and her husband had a taste for gastronomical curiosities from the four corners of the world. On this occasion they decided to have some ox-tail soup, grilled mullet, undercut of beef with mushrooms, raviolis in the Italian fashion, hazel hens from Russia, and a salad of truffles, without counting caviare and kilkis as side-dishes, a glace pralinée, and a little emerald-colored Hungarian cheese, with fruit and pastry. As wine, some old Bordeaux claret in decanters, Chambertin with the roast, and sparkling Moselle at dessert in lieu of Champagne which was voted commonplace.

At seven o'clock Sandoz and Henriette were waiting for their guests, he simply wearing a jacket, and she looking very elegant in a plain dress of black satin. People dined at their place in frock coats, without any fuss. The drawing-room, the arrangements of which they were now completing, was becoming crowded with old furniture, old tapestry, nick-nacks of all countries and all times—a rising stream now overflowing which had taken its source at Batignolles with the old pot of Rouen ware which Henriette had given her husband on one of his fête days. They ran about to the curiosity shops together; they had a joyful passion for buying; and he now satisfied old longings of his youth, romanticist ambitions, which the first books he had read had given birth to; and thus this writer, so fiercely modern, lived amid the worm-eaten middle ages which he had dreamt of when he was a lad of fifteen. As an excuse, he laughingly said that handsome modern furniture cost too dear, whilst with old things, even common ones, you immediately obtained something with effect and color. There was nothing of the collector about him, he was entirely concerned as to decoration and broad effects; and, to tell the truth, the drawing-room, lighted by two lamps of old Delft ware, had quite a soft and warm tint with the dull gold of the dalmaticas used for upholstering the seats, the yellowish incrustations of the Italian cabinets and Dutch show-cases, the faded hues of the Oriental door-hangings, the hundred little notes of the ivory, crockery and enamel work, grown pale with age, and standing out against the dull, neutral, red hangings of the room.

Claude and Christine were the first to arrive. The latter had put on her only silk dress, an old, worn-out garment which she preserved with especial care for similar occasions. Henriette at once took hold of both her hands and drew her on to a sofa. She was very fond of her and questioned her, seeing her so strange, touchingly pale, and with anxious eyes. What was the matter?

Did she feel poorly? No, no, she answered that she was very gay and very much pleased to come, and, while she spoke, her eyes glanced every minute at Claude as if to study him, and then turned away. He seemed excited, with a feverishness in his words and gestures which he had not shown for a month past. At intervals, however, his agitation subsided, and he remained silent with his eyes wide open, gazing vacantly into space at something which he fancied was calling him.

"Ah! old man," he said to Sandoz, "I finished reading your book last night. It's deucedly clever; you have shut up their mouths this time!"

They both talked standing in front of the chimney-piece where some logs were blazing. Sandoz had, indeed, just published a new novel, and, although the critics did not disarm, there was at last that stir of success which establishes a man's reputation despite the persistent attacks of his adversaries. Besides, he had no illusions; he knew very well that the battle, even if it were won, would begin again at each fresh book he wrote. The great work of his life was advancing, that series of novels, the volumes which he launched forth one after another in obstinate, regular fashion, marching towards the goal he had selected without letting anything conquer him, either obstacles, or insults, or fatigue.

"It's true," he gayly replied, "they are weakening this time. There's even one who has been foolish enough to admit that I'm an honest man. See how everything degenerates! But they'll make up for it, never fear! I know some of them whose heads are too much unlike my own for them ever to accept my literary formula, my boldness of language, my physiological characters moving about under the influence of circumstances; and I speak of brother writers who possess self-respect; I leave the fools and the scoundrels on one side. For a man to be able to work on pluckily, it is best for him

not to expect either good faith or justice. To be in the right he must begin by dying."

Claude's eyes abruptly turned towards a corner of the drawing-room, transpiercing the wall and going far away yonder, whither something had summoned him. Then they become hazy and came back from their journey, whilst he exclaimed:

"Oh! you speak for yourself! I should do wrong to kick the bucket. No matter, your book sent me into a deuced fever. I wanted to paint to-day, but I couldn't. Ah! it's lucky that I can't get jealous of you, else you would make me too unhappy."

However, the door had opened, and Mathilde came in, followed by Jory. She was richly attired in a tunic of nasturtium-tinted velvet and a skirt of straw-colored satin, with diamonds in her ears and a large bouquet of roses on her bosom. What astonished Claude the most was that he did not recognize her, for she had become plump, round and fair skinned, in lieu of thin and sunburnt as he had known her. Her disturbing ugliness had melted away in a swelling of the face, her mouth, once noted for its black voids, now displayed teeth, which looked too white, whenever she condescended to smile, with a disdainful turning-up of the upper lip. You could guess that she had become immoderately respectable, her five and forty summers lent her weight beside her husband, who was younger than herself and seemed to be her nephew. The only thing of yore that clung to her was a violent perfume; she drenched herself with the strongest essences, as if she had been anxious to wash from her skin the smell of the aromatic simples with which the herbalist business had impregnated her; but the sharpness of the rhubarb, the bitterness of the elder-seed, the heat of the peppermint clung to her; and as soon as she crossed the drawing-room, it was filled with the undefinable smell of a chemist's shop, relieved by an acute odor of musk.

Henriette, who had risen, made her sit down beside Christine, saying:

"You know each other, don't you? You have already met here."

Mathilde gave but a cold glance at the modest attire of this woman. She herself was exceedingly rigid respecting such matters since the tolerance prevailing in literary and artistic circles had admitted her into a few drawing-rooms. Henriette hated her, however, and after the customary exchange of courtesies, not to be dispensed with, resumed her conversation with Christine.

Jory had shaken hands with Claude and Sandoz, and standing near them, in front of the fireplace, he apologized for an article which had appeared that very morning in his review, and which slashed the novelist's new book.

"As you know very well, my dear fellow, one is never the master in one's own house! I ought to see everything, but I have so little time! I hadn't even read that article, so I relied on what had been told me about it. So you will understand how enraged I was when I read it this afternoon. I am dreadfully grieved, dreadfully grieved—"

"Oh, let it be. It's the natural order of things," replied Sandoz, quietly. "Now that my enemies are beginning to praise me, it's only proper that my friends should attack me."

The door again opened and Gagnière softly glided in, with the vague air of a droll shadow. He had arrived straight from Melun and was quite alone, for he never showed his wife to anybody. When he thus came to dinner he brought the country dust with him on his boots, and he carried it back with him the same night on taking the last train. On the other hand, he did not alter; or rather age seemed to rejuvenate him; his complexion became fairer as he grew old.

"Hallo! why, Gagnière's here!" exclaimed Sandoz.

Then, just as Gagnière was making up his mind to bow to the ladies, Mahoudeau came in. He had already grown gray with his hollow, fierce-looking face and childish, blinking eyes. He still wore a pair of trousers a good deal too short for him, and a frock-coat which creased in the back, in spite of the money which he now earned; for the bronze manufacturer whom he worked for had brought out some charming statuettes of his, which you began to see on middle-class mantel-shelves and consoles.

Sandoz and Claude had turned round, inquisitive to witness the meeting between Mahoudeau and Mathilde. However, matters passed off very quietly. The sculptor respectfully bowed to her, while Jory, the husband, with his air of serene unconsciousness, thought fit to introduce her to him, for the twentieth time, perhaps.

"Eh! it's my wife, old fellow. Shake hands together."

Thereupon, both very grave, like people of society who are forced somewhat over promptly into familiarity, Mathilde and Mahoudeau shook hands. Only as soon as the latter had got rid of the job and had found Gagnière in a corner of the drawing-room, they both began sneering and recalling, in terrible language, all the abominations of yore.

Dubuche was expected that evening, for he had formally promised to come.

"Yes," explained Henriette. "There will only be nine of us. Fagerolles wrote this morning to apologize—he is forced to go to some official dinner—but he hopes to escape, and will join us at about eleven o'clock."

At this moment, however, a servant came in with a telegram. It was from Dubuche, who telegraphed: "Impossible to stir. Alice has an alarming cough."

"Well, we shall only be eight, then," resumed Henriette, with the somewhat peevish resignation of a hostess disappointed by her guests.

And the servant having opened the dining-room door and announced that dinner was ready, she added:

"We are all here. Claude, offer me your arm."

Sandoz took Mathilde's, Jory charged himself with Christine, while Mahoudeau and Gagnière brought up the rear, still joking coarsely about what they called the beautiful herbalist's padding.

The dining-room which they now entered was very spacious, and the light was gayly bright after the subdued illumination of the drawing-room. The walls, covered with specimens of old earthenware, displayed a gay medley of colors, reminding one of cheap colored prints. Two sideboards, one loaded with glass, and the other with silver plate, sparkled like jewellers' show cases. And in the centre of the room, under the suspension-lamp girt round with tapers, the table glistened like a catafalco, with the whiteness of its cloth, laid in perfect style with decorated plates, cut glass decanters white with water or ruddy with wine, and symmetrical side dishes, all set out round the centrepiece, a basket of purple roses.

They sat down, Henriette between Claude and Mahoudeau, Sandoz with Mathilde and Christine beside him, Jory and Gagnière at either end; and the servant had barely finished serving the soup, when Madame Jory made a most unfortunate remark. Wishing to show herself amiable, and not having heard her husband's apologies, she said to the master of the house:

"Well, were you pleased with the article in this morning's number? Edouard personally revised the proofs with the greatest care!"

On hearing this, Jory became confused and stammered:

"No, no! you are mistaken! It was a very bad article, indeed, and you know very well that it was 'passed' the other evening while I was away."

By the silent embarrassment which ensued she realized

her blunder. But she made matters still worse, for giving her husband a sharp glance, she retorted in a very loud voice so as to crush him, as it were, and disengage her own responsibility:

"Another of your lies! I repeat what you told me. I won't allow you to make me ridiculous, do you hear!"

This threw a chill over the beginning of the dinner. Henriette recommended the kilkis, but Christine alone found them very nice. When the grilled mullet appeared, Sandoz, who was amused by Jory's embarrassment, gayly reminded him of a lunch they had had together at Marseilles in the old days. Ah! Marseilles, the only city where people know how to eat!

Claude, who for a moment had been absorbed in thought, now seemed to awaken from a dream, and without any transition he asked:

"Is it decided? Have they selected the artists for the new decorations of the Hôtel de Ville?"

"No," said Mahoudeau; "they are going to do so. I sha'n't get anything, for I don't know any one. Fagerolles himself is very anxious. If he isn't here to-night, it's because matters are not going smoothly. Ah! he has had his bite at the cherry; all that painting for millions is spoiling and cracking to bits!"

There was a laugh, expressive of spite finally satisfied, and even Gagnière at the other end of the table indulged in the sneering. Then they eased their feelings in malicious words and rejoiced over the sudden fall of prices which had thrown the world of "young masters" into consternation. It was inevitable, the predicted time was coming, the exaggerated rise of prices was finishing in a catastrophe. Since the amateurs had been panic-striken, seized with the consternation of speculators when "a fall" sweeps over the Stock Exchange, prices were giving way day by day, nothing more was sold. It was a sight to see the famous Naudet amid the rout; he had held out at first, he had invented the stroke of the Yankee,

the unique picture hidden deep in some gallery, in solitude like an idol, the picture which he would not name the price of, being contemptuously certain that he could not find a man rich enough to purchase it, but which he finally sold for two or three hundred thousand francs to some pig-dealer of New York, who felt glorious at carrying off the dearest canvas of the year. But these fine strokes of business were not to be renewed at present, and Naudet, whose expenditure had increased with his gains, drawn onward and swallowed up in the mad craze which was his own work, now heard his regal mansion crumbling beneath him, reduced to defend it against the assault of creditors.

"Won't you take some more mushrooms, Mahoudeau?" obligingly interrupted Henriette.

The servant was now handing round the undercut; they ate, and emptied the decanters; but their bitterness was so great that the best things were offered without being tasted, which distressed the master and mistress of the house.

"Mushrooms, eh?" the sculptor ended by repeating. "No, thanks," and he added: "The funny part of it all is that Naudet is suing Fagerolles! Oh, quite so! he's going to distrain on him. Ah! it makes me laugh! We shall see a pretty scouring in the Avenue de Villiers among all those petty painters with mansions of their own! House property will go for nothing next spring! Well, Naudet, who had compelled Fagerolles to build a house, and who furnished it for him as he would have furnished a place for a woman, wanted to get hold of his nick-nacks and hangings again. But Fagerolles had borrowed money on them, so it seems. You can imagine the state of affairs; the dealer accuses the artist of having spoilt his game by exhibiting, with the vanity of a giddy fool; while the painter replies that he doesn't mean to be robbed any longer; and they'll end by devouring each other, at least I hope so."

Gagnière raised his voice, the gentle but inexorable voice of a dreamer just awakened:

"Fagerolles is done for! Besides, he never had any success."

The others protested. Well, what about the hundred thousand francs' worth of pictures he had sold a year, and his medals and his cross of the Legion of Honor? But Gagnière, still obstinate, smiled with a mysterious air, as if facts could not prevail against his inner conviction. He wagged his head, and full of disdain, replied:

"Let me be! He never knew anything about chiaroscuro."

Jory was about to defend the talent of Fagerolles, whom he considered his work, when Henriette asked for a little attention for the raviolis. There was a short slackening of the quarrel amid the crystaline clinking of the glasses and the light clatter of the forks. The table, laid with such fine symmetry, was already in confusion, and seemed to sparkle still more amid the ardent fire of the quarrel. And Sandoz, growing anxious, felt astonished; what was the matter with them all that they attacked Fagerolles so harshly? Hadn't they all begun together, and were they not all to reach the goal in the same victory? For the first time, a feeling of uneasiness disturbed his dream of eternity, that delight in his Thursdays, which he beheld following one upon another, all alike, all of them happy ones, into the far distance of the future. But the feeling was as yet only skin deep, and he laughingly exclaimed:

"Husband your strength, Claude, here are the hazel-hens. Eh! Claude, where are you?"

Since silence had prevailed, Claude had relapsed into his dream, gazing about him vacantly, and taking a second help of raviolis without knowing what he was about; Christine, who said nothing but sat there looking sad and charming, did not take her eyes off him.

He started when Sandoz spoke, chose a leg from amid the bits of hazel-hen now being served, the strong fumes of which filled the room with a resinous smell.

"Do you smell that?" exclaimed Sandoz, amused; "one would think one was swallowing all the forests of Russia."

But Claude returned to the matter which preoccupied him:

"Then you say that Fagerolles will be entrusted with the paintings for the Municipal Council's assembly room?"

And this remark sufficed; Mahoudeau and Gagnière, set on the track, again started off at once. Ah! a nice wishy-washy smearing it would be if that assembly room was allotted to him; and he was doing plenty of dirty things to get it. He, who had formerly pretended to deride orders for work, like a great artist surrounded by amateurs, was basely cringing to the officials, now that his pictures no longer sold. Could anything more despicable be imagined than a painter soliciting a functionary, borrowing and scraping, showing all kinds of cowardice and making all kinds of concessions? It was shameful that art should be dependent upon a minister's idiotic good pleasure! Fagerolles, at that official dinner he had gone to, was no doubt conscientiously licking the boots of some chief clerk, some idiot who was only fit to be made a guy of.

"Well," said Jory, "he effects his purpose, and he's quite right. You won't pay his debts."

"Debts? Have I any debts, I who have always starved?" answered Mahoudeau in a roughly arrogant tone. "Ought a fellow to build himself a palace, and have friends like that Irma who ruins Fagerolles?"

Gagnière again interrupted him, speaking oracularly in his distant, strange, cracked voice:

"Irma! Why she pays him."

At this Jory grew angry, while the others jested, and

Irma's name was flying about over the table, when Mathilde, who had so far remained reserved and silent by way of making a show of her good breeding, became intensely indignant, making wild gestures, and pursing her mouth with the prudish air of a devotee.

"Oh! gentlemen, oh! gentlemen, to talk before us about that woman! No, not that woman, I implore you!"

After that Henriette and Sandoz, who were in consternation, witnessed the rout of their menu. The truffle salad, the ice, the dessert, everything was swallowed without being appreciated amid the rising anger of the quarrel; and the Chambertin and sparkling Moselle were absorbed as if they had merely been water. In vain did Henriette smile, while Sandoz good naturedly tried to calm them by making allowances for human weakness. Not one of them retreated; a single word made them spring desperately upon each other. There was none of the vague boredom, the somniferous satiety which at times had saddened their old gatherings; at present there was real ferociousness in the struggle, a longing to destroy one another. The tapers of the suspension-lamp flared up, the painted flowers of the earthenware on the walls bloomed, the table seemed to have caught fire amid the upsetting of its symmetrical arrangements and the violence of the talk, that demolishing which had filled them with fever for a couple of hours past.

And amid the racket, when Henriette made up her mind to rise so as to silence them, Claude at length remarked:

"Ah! if I only had the Hôtel de Ville work, and if I could! It was my dream to cover the walls of Paris!"

They returned into the drawing-room where the little chandelier and the bracket-candelabra had just been lighted. It seemed almost cold there in comparison with the kind of hot-house which had just been left; and

for a moment the coffee calmed the guests. Nobody beyond Fagerolles was expected. The house was not an open one by any means, the Sandozes did not recruit literary dependents, or muzzle the press by dint of invitations. The wife detested society, and the husband said with a laugh that he needed ten years to take a liking to any one, and then he must like him always. But was not that real happiness, seldom realized? A few sound friendships, a nook full of family affection. No music was ever played there, and no one had ever read a page of his composition out loud.

On that particular Thursday the evening seemed a long one, on account of the latent, persistive irritation of the men. The ladies had begun to chat before the smouldering fire; and when the servant, after clearing the table, reopened the door of the dining-room, they were left alone, the men repairing into the adjoining apartment to smoke, while sipping some beer.

Sandoz and Claude, who were not smokers, soon returned, however, and sat down, side by side, on a sofa near the door. The former, who was glad to see his old friend excited and talkative, recalled the memories of Plassans apropos of a bit of news he had learnt the day before. Pouillaud, the old jester of the dormitory, who had become so grave a lawyer, was now in trouble. Ah! that beast of a Pouillaud! But Claude did not answer, for, having heard his name mentioned in the dining-room, he was listening attentively, trying to understand.

Jory, Mahoudeau and Gagnière, unsatiated and eager for another bite, had started on the massacre again. Their voices, at first mere whispers, gradually grew louder, till at last they began to shout.

"Oh! the man, I abandon the man to you," said Jory, who was speaking of Fagerolles. "He isn't worth much. And he outgeneraled you, it's true; ah! how he did get the better of you fellows, by breaking off with you and

carving success for himself on your backs! You were certainly not at all cute."

Mahoudeau, waxing furious, replied:

"Of course! It sufficed for us to be with Claude to be turned out of everywhere."

"It was Claude who did for us," so Gagnière squarely asserted.

And they went on, relinquishing Fagerolles, whom they reproached for toadying the newspapers, for allying himself with their enemies and wheedling sexegenarian baronesses, to fall upon Claude who now became the great culprit. Well, after all, the other fellow was only a simple trickster, like there are so many in the artistic fraternity, fellows who accost the public at street corners, leave their comrades in the lurch, and victimize them so as to get the middle-classes into their studios. But Claude, that abortive great artist, that impotent fellow who couldn't set a figure on its legs in spite of all his pride, hadn't he just compromised them, hadn't he let them in! Ah! yes, success had lain in breaking off. If they had been able to begin over again, they wouldn't have been idiots enough to cling obstinately to impossible principles! And they accused Claude of having paralyzed them, of having traded on them, yes, traded on them, but in so clumsy, dull-witted a manner that he had not derived any profit from it.

"Why, as for me," resumed Mahoudeau, "didn't he make me quite idiotic at one moment? When I think over it, I feel myself, and I can't understand why I ever joined his band. Am I at all like him? Was there ever any one thing in common between us, eh? Ah! it's exasperating to find the truth out so late in the day!"

"And as for myself," said Gagnière, "he robbed me of my originality. Do you think it has amused me, each time I have exhibited a painting during the last fifteen years, to hear people saying behind me, 'That's a Claude!' Oh! I've had enough of it. I prefer not to

paint any more! All the same, if I had seen clearly, in former times, I shouldn't have associated with him."

It was a stampede, the snapping of the last ties, amid their stupefaction at suddenly finding that they were strangers and enemies, after a long youth of fraternity together. Life had disbanded them on the road, and the great dissimilarity of their characters was revealed; all that remained in their throats was the bitterness of the old enthusiastic dream, that erstwhile hope of battle and victory side by side, which now increased their spite.

"The fact is," sneered Jory, "that Fagerolles did not let himself be pillaged like a simpleton."

But Mahoudeau, feeling vexed, became angry. "You do wrong to laugh," he said, "for you are a nice backslider yourself. Yes, you always told us that you would give us a lift up when you had a paper of your own."

"Ah! allow me, allow me—"

Gagnière united with Mahoudeau: "That's quite true!" he said. "You won't tell us again that what you write about us is cut out, for you are the master now! And yet never a word, you didn't even name us in your articles on the last Salon."

Jory, embarrassed and stammering, flew into a rage in his turn.

"Ah! well, it's the fault of that cursed Claude! I don't care to lose my subscribers simply to please you fellows. It's impossible to do anything for you; there, do you understand? You, Mahoudeau, you may wear yourself out in producing pretty little things; you, Gagnière, you may even never do anything more; but you each have a label on the back, and you'll need ten years' efforts before you'll be able to get it off; and, in fact, there have been some labels that would never come off. The public is amused by it, you know; there were only you fellows to believe in the genius of that big ridiculous lunatic, who will be locked up in a mad-house one of these fine mornings."

Then the dispute became terrible, they all three spoke at once, coming, at last, to abominable reproaches, with such outbursts, and such furious motion of the jaws, that they positively seemed to be biting one another.

Sandoz, seated on the sofa, and disturbed in the gay memories he was recalling, was, at last, obliged to lend an ear to the tumult which reached him through the open doorway.

"You hear them?" whispered Claude with a smile of suffering; "they are giving it to me nicely! No, no, stay here, I won't let you stop them; I deserve it, since I have failed to succeed!"

And Sandoz, turning pale, remained there, listening to this bitter quarrelling, the outcome of the struggle for life, this spite of conflicting personalities grappling together, which bore his chimera of everlasting friendship away.

Henriette, fortunately, became anxious on hearing the violent shouting. She rose up and went to shame the smokers for thus forsaking the ladies to go and quarrel together. They then all returned into the drawing-room, perspiring, breathing hard, and still shaken by their fit of anger. And as Henriette, with her eyes on the clock, remarked that they certainly would not see Fagerolles that evening, they began to sneer again, exchanging glances. Ah! he had a fine scent, and no mistake; he wouldn't be caught associating with old friends, who had become troublesome and whom he hated.

In fact, Fagerolles did not come. The evening finished laboriously. They returned into the dining-room, where the tea was served on a Russian tablecloth embroidered with a stag hunt in red thread; and under the tapers a plain cake was displayed with plates full of sweet stuff and pastry, and a barbarous collection of liquors, whisky, hollands, Chio raki and kümmel. The servant also brought some punch, and bestirred himself round

the table, while the mistress of the house filled the tea-pot from the samovar, boiling in front of her. But all the comfort, the feast for the eyes, the fine perfume of the tea did not relax their hearts. The conversation again turned on the success that some men met with, and the ill-luck that befell others. For instance, was it not shameful that art should be dishonored by all those medals, those crosses, all those rewards, so badly distributed to boot? Were artists always to remain like little boys at school? All the platitude came from that —that docility and cowardice shown, as in the presence of ushers, so as to obtain good marks!

When they had repaired to the drawing-room once more and just as Sandoz, who was greatly distressed, began to feel an ardent wish that they would take themselves off, he noticed Mathilde and Gagnière, seated side by side on a sofa, and languishingly talking about music, while the others remained extenuated, lacking saliva, and their jaws with no strength left them. Gagnière was philosophizing and poetizing in a state of ecstacy, while Mathilde rolled up her eyes and went into raptures as if titillated by some invisible wing. They had caught sight of each other on the previous Sunday at the concert at the Cirque, and they apprised each other of their enjoyment in alternate, far-soaring sentences.

"Ah! that Meyerbeer, monsieur, that overture of Struensee, that funereal strain, and then that peasant dance, so full of dash and color; and then the mournful burden which returns, the duo of the violoncellos. Ah! monsieur, the violoncellos, the violoncellos!"

"And Berlioz, madame, the fête air in Romeo! Oh! the solo of the clarionets, the beloved women, with the harp accompaniment! Something enrapturing, something white as snow which ascends. The fête bursts upon you like a picture by Paul Veronese, with the tumultuous magnificence of the Marriage of Cana; and

then the love song begins again, oh! how softly! oh! always higher! higher still—"

"Did you notice, monsieur, in Beethoven's Symphony in A, that knell which ever and ever comes back and beats upon your heart? Yes, I see very well, you feel as I do, music is a communion. Beethoven, ah, me! how sad and sweet it is to be two to understand him and give way—"

"And Schumann, madame, and Wagner, madame—Schumann's 'Reverie,' nothing but the stringed instruments, a warm shower falling on the acacia leaves, a sun-ray which dries them, barely a tear in space. Wagner! ah! Wagner, the overture of the 'Flying Dutchman,' are you not fond of it?—tell me you are fond of it! As for myself, it overcomes me. There is nothing left, nothing left, you expire—"

Their voices died away, they did not even look at each other, but sat there elbow to elbow, their faces in the air, quite overcome.

Sandoz, who was surprised, asked himself where Mathilde could have picked up this jargon. In some article of Jory's, perhaps; besides, he had remarked that women talk music very well, even without knowing a note of it. And he, whom the bitterness of the others had only grieved, became exasperated at sight of Mathilde's languishing attitude. No, no, that was quite enough; the men tore each other to bits; still that might pass, after all; but what an end to the evening, this feminine fraud, cooing and titillating herself with thoughts of Beethoven's and Schumann's music!

Fortunately, Gagnière suddenly rose up. He knew what o'clock it was even in the depths of his ecstacy, and he had only just the time to catch his last train. And, after exchanging nerveless and silent handshakes with the others, he went off to sleep at Melun.

"What a failure he is!" muttered Mahoudeau. "Music has killed painting: he'll never do anything!"

He himself had to leave, and the door had scarcely closed behind his back when Jory declared:

"Have you seen his last paper-weight? He'll end by sculpturing sleeve-links. There's a fellow who has missed his aim. To think that he prided himself on being vigorous!"

But Mathilde was already afoot, taking leave of Christine with a dry little inclination of the head, affecting social familiarity with Henriette, and carrying off her husband, who helped her on with her cloak in the anteroom, humble and terrified at the severe glance she gave him, for she had an account to settle.

Then, the door having closed behind them, Sandoz, beside himself, cried out: "That's the end! The journalist was bound to call the others abortions—yes, the journalist, who, after patching up articles, has fallen to trading upon public credulity! Ah! luckily there's Mathilde the Avenger!"

Christine and Claude alone remained. The latter, since the drawing-room had been growing empty, had remained ensconced in the depths of an arm-chair, no longer speaking, being conquered again by that species of magnetic slumber which stiffened him and fixed his eyes on something afar off beyond the walls. He protruded his face, a convulsive kind of attention seemed to carry it forward; he certainly beheld something invisible, and heard a summons in the silence.

Christine having risen up in her turn and apologized for being the last to leave, Henriette took hold of her hands, repeated how fond she was of her, begged of her to come and see her frequently, and to dispose of her in all things as she would with a sister. But Claude's sorrowful wife, looking so sadly charming in her black dress, shook her head with a pallid smile.

"Come," said Sandoz in her ear, after giving a glance at Claude, "you musn't distress yourself like that. He

has talked a great deal, he has been gayer this evening. He's all right."

But in a terrified voice she answered:

"No, no, look at his eyes—I shall tremble as long as he has his eyes like that. You have done all you could, thanks. What you haven't done no one will do. Ah! how I suffer at not being able to hope, at not being able to do anything!"

Then in a loud tone she asked:

"Are you coming, Claude?"

She had to repeat her question twice, for at first he did not hear her; he ended by starting, however, and rose to his feet, saying, as if he had answered the summons from the horizon afar off:

"Yes, I'm coming, I'm coming."

When Sandoz and his wife at last found themselves alone in the drawing-room, where the atmosphere now was stifling—heated by the lights and heavy, as it were, with melancholy silence after the evil outbursts of the quarrels—they looked at each other and let their arms fall, quite heart-rent by the unfortunate issue of their dinner party. She tried to laugh it off, however, murmuring:

"I warned you, I quite understood—"

But he interrupted her with a despairing gesture. What! was that, then, the end of his long illusion, that dream of eternity which had made him set happiness in a few friendships, formed in childhood and shared until extreme old age? Ah! what a lamentable band, what a final splitting up, what a terrible balance sheet to weep over after this bankruptcy of the human heart! And he grew astonished on thinking of the friends who had fallen off by the roadside, of the great affections lost on the way, of the others unceasingly changing around himself, in whom he found no change. His poor Thursdays filled him with pity, so many memories in mourning, the slow death of what one loves! Would

his wife and himself have to resign themselves to live as in a desert, to cloister themselves in utter hatred of the world? Should they rather throw their doors wide open to the throng of strangers and indifferent folks? By degrees a certainty dawned in the depths of his grief: everything ended and nothing began again in life. He seemed to yield to evidence, and said, heaving a big sigh:

"You were right. We won't invite them to dinner again—they would devour one another."

As soon as Claude and Christine reached the Place de la Trinité on their way home, the painter let go of his wife's arm, and stammering that he had to go somewhere, he begged of her to return to the Rue Tourlaque without him. She had felt him shake with a great shudder, and she remained quite scared with surprise and fear. Somewhere to go to at that hour—past midnight! Where had he got to go to, and what for? He had turned round and was making off, when she overtook him, and, pretending that she was frightened, begged that he would not leave her to climb up to Montmartre alone at that time of night. This consideration alone brought him back. He took her arm again; they ascended the Rue Blanche and the Rue Lepic, and at last found themselves in the Rue Tourlaque. And on reaching their door, he rang the bell, and then again left her.

"Here you are," he said; "I'm going."

He was already hastening away, taking long strides, and gesticulating like a madman. Without even closing the door which had been opened, she darted off, bent on following him. In the Rue Lepic she drew near; but for fear of exciting him still more she contented herself with keeping him in sight, walking along some thirty yards in the rear, without his knowing that she was behind him. On reaching the end of the Rue Lepic he went down the Rue Blanche again, and then took by way of the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin and the Rue du

Quartre Septembre as far as the Rue de Richelieu. When she saw him proceed along this last-named thoroughfare, a mortal chill came over her: he was going towards the Seine; it was the realization of the frightful fear which kept her of a night awake with anguish. And what could she do, good Lord! Go with him, hang on to his neck over there? She was now only able to stagger along, and as each step brought them nearer to the river, she felt life ebbing from her limbs. Yes, he was going straight there; he crossed the Place du Théâtre Français, then the Carrousel, and finally reached the Pont des Saints-Pères. After taking a few steps along the bridge, he approached the railing overlooking the water; and she thought he was jumping over, a loud cry was stifled in her contracted throat.

But no; he remained motionless. Was it then only the Cité over yonder that haunted him, that heart of Paris which pursued him everwhere, which he conjured up with his fixed eyes, even through walls, and which, when leagues away, cried out that constant summons heard by him alone? She did not yet dare to hope it; she had stopped short, in the rear, watching him with giddy anxiety, ever fancying that she saw him take the terrible leap, resisting her longing to draw nearer, and fearing that she might precipitate the catastrophe by showing herself. Oh, God! to think that she was there with her devouring passion, her bleeding motherly heart, that she was there beholding everything without daring to risk one movement to hold him back!

He stood erect, looking very tall, quite motionless, and gazing into the night.

It was a winter's night, with a misty sky of sooty blackness, which a sharp wind blowing from the west rendered extremely cold. Paris, lighted up, had gone to sleep, showing no signs of life save such as attached to the gas-jets, round specks which scintillated and grew smaller and smaller in the distance till they seemed but

a dust of fixed stars. The quays stretched away with their double rows of these luminous beads, the reverberation of which glimmered on the nearer frontages, the houses of the Quai du Louvre on the left, the two wings of the Institute on the right, confused masses of monuments and buildings, which were lost to view in the darkening shade, studded with distant sparks. Then between these cordons of burners, extending as far as the eye could reach, the bridges stretched their bars of lights, slighter and slighter, each formed of a train of spangles, grouped together and seemingly hanging in mid-air. And in the Seine there shone the nocturnal splendor of the animated water of cities; each gas-jet reflected its flame, a comet's nucleus extending into a tail. The nearer ones, mingling together, set the current on fire with broad, regular, symmetrical fans, glowing like live embers, while the more distant ones, seen under the bridges, were but little motionless sparks of fire. But the large burning tails were animated, wagging as they spread out, black and gold, in a constant twirling of scales, in which one felt the infinite flow of the water. The whole Seine was lighted up by them, as if some fête were being given in its depths; some mysterious, fairy-like entertainment, with couples waltzing beneath the red-flashing window-panes of the river. High up above this fire, above the starry quays, the sky, in which not a planet displayed itself, showed a ruddy mass of vapor, that warm, phosphorescent exhalation which every night, above the sleep of the city, raises the crater of a volcano.

The wind blew hard, and Christine, shivering, her eyes full of tears, felt the bridge turn under her, as if it were bearing her away amid a splitting up of the whole horizon. Had not Claude moved? Was he not climbing over the rail? No; everything became motionless again, and she saw him standing on the same spot, obstinately

stiff, with his eyes turned towards the point of the Cité, which he could not see.

It had summoned him, and he had come, and he couldn't see it in the depths of the darkness. He could only distinguish the bridges, the light framework standing out quite black against the sparkling water. But farther off, everything became confused, the island had disappeared, he would not even have been able to tell its exact situation if some belated cabs had not passed from time to time over the Pont-Neuf, with their lamps looking like those shooting sparks which dart at times through extinguished coal. A red lantern, on a level with the dam of the Mint, cast a streamlet of blood, as it were, into the water. Something huge and lugubrious, some drifting form, no doubt a lighter which had become unmoored, slowly descended the stream amid the reflections; espied for a moment, and then immediately afterwards lost in the darkness. Where had the triumphal island sunk? Into the depths of this flow of water? He still gazed, gradually fascinated by the great rushing of the river in the night. He leant over the broad bed of the stream, fresh like an abyss, and in which the mysterious flames were dancing. And the loud, sad noise of the current attracted him, he listened to its call, despairing unto death.

By a shooting pain at her heart, Christine this time realized that the terrible thought had just occurred to him. She held out her vacillating hands which the wind was lashing. But Claude had remained there, struggling against the sweetness of dying; and he did not move during another hour, remaining there unconscious of the lapse of time, with his eyes still fixed in the direction of the Cité, as if by a miracle of power they were about to create light and conjure up the island.

When Claude at last left the bridge, with stumbling steps, Christine had to pass before him and run so as to be home in the Rue Tourlaque before him.

CHAPTER XII.

SUICIDE.

IT was nearly three o'clock when they went to bed that night, with the bitter cold November wind blowing through their room and the vast studio. Christine, breathless from her run, had quickly slipped between the sheets so that he might not know that she had followed him; and Claude, quite overcome, had taken his clothes off, one garment after another, without saying a word. For long months they had lain down side by side like strangers, and Christine had accepted the situation with proud, mute grief. Until that night, however, she had never felt such a barrier between them, such coldness, as if nothing henceforth could warm them.

She struggled for nearly a quarter of an hour against the sleep which was coming over her. She felt very tired and a kind of torpor numbed her; still she would not give way, feeling anxious at leaving him awake. She waited every evening until he dozed off, so that she herself might sleep in peace. But he had not extinguished the candle, he lay there with his eyes open, fixed upon that flame which blinded him. What could he be thinking of? Had he remained over there in the black night, amid the moist breath of the quays in front of Paris studded with stars like a frosty sky?—and what inner conflict, what matter that had to be decided, contracted his face like that? Then, resistance being impossible, she succumbed and glided into the oblivion following upon great weariness.

An hour later, the consciousness of something missing, the anguish of uneasiness awoke her with a sudden start. She at once felt the place beside her, it was already cold: he was no longer there, she had already divined it while asleep. And she was growing alarmed, but half-awake, her head heavy and her ears buzzing, when through the doorway, left ajar, she perceived a ray of light coming from the studio. She then felt reassured, she thought that in a fit of sleeplessness he had gone to fetch some book; but, at last, as he did not return, she ended by softly rising so as to take a look. What she beheld quite unsettled her, and kept her standing on the tiled floor, with her feet bare, and in such surprise that she did not at first dare to show herself.

Claude, who was in his shirt sleeves, despite the coldness of the temperature, having merely put on his trousers and slippers in his haste, was standing on the steps in front of the large picture. His palette was lying at his feet and with one hand he was holding the candle, while with the other he was painting. His eyes were dilated like those of a somnambulist, his gestures were precise and stiff, he stooped every minute to take some color on his brush and then rose up, casting a large fantastic shadow, with jerky, automatic movements, on the wall. And there was not a sound, frightful silence reigned in the vast dim room.

Christine guessed the truth and shuddered. The besetting worry, made more acute by that hour spent on the Pont des Saints-Pères, had prevented him from sleeping and had brought him in front of his canvas, consumed with a longing to look at it again, in spite of the hour. He had, no doubt, only climbed the steps to fill his eyes the nearer. Then, tortured at sight of some faulty shade, upset by this defect to such a point that he could not wait for daylight, he had caught up a brush, at first merely wishing to give a simple touch, and then carried away from correction to correction until at last, with the

candle in his hand, he painted there like a man in hallucination, amid the pale light which darted here and there as he gesticulated. His powerless, creative rage had seized hold of him again, he was wearing himself out, oblivious of the hour, oblivious of the world; he wished to infuse life into his work at once.

Ah! what a pitiful sight, and with what tear-drenched eyes did Christine look at him! At first she thought of leaving him to this mad work, as a maniac is left to the pleasures of his craziness. He would never finish that picture, that was quite certain now. The more desperately he worked at it, the more incoherent it became, the coloring had grown heavy and impasted, the drawing was losing shape and was replete with signs of effort. Even the background and the group of laborers, formerly so substantial, were getting spoiled; and he clung to them, he had obstinately determined to finish everything else before repainting the central figure, the woman, which remained the fright, the desire of his hours of toil, the flesh which made him feel giddy and which would finish him off on the day he again tried to invest it with life. For months past he had not touched it, and this had tranquillized Christine and made her tolerant and compassionate, amid her jealous spite; for, as long as he did not return to that feared woman, she thought he harmed her less.

Her feet were freezing on the tiles and she was turning to get into bed again when a shock brought her back to the door. She had not understood at first, but now at last she saw. With broad curved strokes of his brush, full of color, Claude was modelling plump flesh, his gestures wild and caressing. He had a fixed grin on his lips and did not feel the burning candle grease falling on his fingers, while with silent, passionate see-sawing, his right arm alone moved against the wall, casting huge black confusion upon it, a mingling of twining limbs. He was working at the woman.

Then Christine opened the door and walked into the studio. An invincible revolt, the anger of the spouse buffeted at home, impelled her forward. Yes, he was with that other, he was painting her like a maddened visionary, whom the worry of truth had thrown into the exaltation of the unreal. She had suffered too much, she would not tolerate this treason.

And yet at first she simply showed herself despairing and supplicating. It was but the mother remonstrating with her big mad boy of an artist.

"What are you doing there, Claude? Is it reasonable, Claude, to have such ideas? I beg of you, don't stay on those steps where you will catch your death of cold."

He did not answer, he stooped down again to take some more paint on his brush and he made the figure flash with two bright strokes of vermillion.

"Listen to me, Claude, in pity come with me—you know that I love you—you see how anxious you have made me. Come, oh come! If you don't want me to die of cold and waiting for you."

With his face haggard, he did not look at her, but while he bedecked the figure with carmine, he launched out in a husky voice:

"Just leave me alone, will you? I'm working."

Christine remained silent for a moment. She was drawing herself erect, her eyes began to gleam with a dark fire, rebellion inflated all her gentle, charming form. Then she burst forth, with the growl of a slave driven to extremities:

"Well, no, I won't leave you alone! I've had enough of it. I'll tell you what's stifling me, what has been killing me ever since I have known you! Ah! that painting, yes, your painting, she's the murderess who has poisoned my life! I had a presentiment of it on the first day; your painting frightened me like a monster. I found it abominable, execrable; but then

one's cowardly, I loved you too much not to like it as well; I ended by growing accustomed to that criminal! But, later on, how I suffered, how it tortured me. For ten years I don't recollect having spent a day without shedding tears! No, leave me, I am easing my mind, I must speak out, since I have found strength enough to do so. For ten years I have been abandoned, crushed every day. Ah! not to be anything more to you, to feel myself cast more and more on one side, to fall to the rank of a servant; and to see that other one, that thief, place herself between you and me and clutch hold of you and triumph and insult me! For dare, yes, dare to say that she hasn't taken possession of you, limb by limb, glided into your brain, your heart, your flesh, everywhere! She holds you like a vise, she feeds on you. In fact, she's your wife, isn't she? Ah! the cursed wretch, the hussy!"

Claude was now listening to her, in his astonishment at this great cry of suffering; and being but half-roused from his exasperated creative dream, he did not as yet very well understand why she was talking to him like that. And at sight of his hebetude, the shuddering of a man surprised and disturbed in his debauch, she flew into a still greater passion, she mounted the steps, tore the candlestick from his hand, and in her turn flashed the light in front of the picture.

"Just look," she cried, "just tell me how you have advanced matters? It's hideous, it's lamentable and grotesque; you'll end by seeing so yourself. Come, isn't it ugly, isn't it idiotic? You see very well that you are conquered, so why should you persist any longer? There is no sense in it, that's what upsets me! If you can't be a great painter, life, at least, remains to us. Ah! life, life."

She had placed the candle on the platform of the steps, and as he had gone down, staggering, she sprang off to join him, and they both found themselves below,

he, fallen on the last step, and she, crouching, pressing his inert, dangling hands with all her strength.

"Come, there's life! Drive your nightmare away, and let us live, live together. Isn't it too stupid to be we two together, to be growing old already, and to torture ourselves, and be unable to find happiness? Oh! the grave will take us soon enough, never fear. Let's try to warm ourselves, and live, and love one another. Remember Bennecourt! Listen to my dream. I should like to be able to take you away to-morrow. We would go far from this cursed Paris, we would find a quiet spot somewhere, and you would see how pleasant I would make your life; how nice it would be to forget everything together. Of a morning one lingers in bed, there are strolls in the sunlight, the breakfast which smells nice, the idle afternoon, the evening spent side by side under the lamp. And no more worrying about chimeras, nothing but the delight of living! Doesn't it suffice that I love you, that I adore you, that I consent to be your servant, your slave, to exist solely for you? Do you hear, I love you, I love you; there is nothing else, and that is enough—I love you!"

He had freed his hands, and making a gesture of refusal he said, in a gloomy voice:

"No, it is not enough! I won't go away with you, I won't be happy, I will paint!"

"And I shall die of it, eh? And you will die of it, and we shall end by leaving all our blood and all our tears in it! There's nothing beyond Art, that is the Almighty, the fierce God who strikes us with his thunder, and whom you honor. He may crush us, he is the master, and you will bless his name!"

"Yes, I belong to him, he may do what he pleases with me. I should die if I no longer painted, and I prefer to paint and die of it. Besides, my will is nothing in the matter. Nothing exists beyond it; let the world burst!"

She drew herself up in a fresh spurt of anger. Her voice became harsh and passionate again.

"But I, I am alive, and the women you love are dead! Oh! don't say no. I know very well that all those painted women are your loves! Before I was yours I had already perceived it! Wasn't it unhealthy and stupid, such tastes in a man—to burn for images, to clasp an empty illusion in his arms; and you knew that it was so, for you tried to hide it like a thing not to be confessed. Then, for a short time, you appeared to love me. It was at that period that you told me all that nonsense! Do you remember? You held those shadows in pity when you were with me. But it didn't last. You returned to them, oh! so quickly, like a maniac returns to his mania. I, although alive, no longer existed for you, it was they, the visions, who again became the only realities of your life. What I then endured you never knew, for you are wonderfully ignorant of women. I have lived by your side without your ever understanding me. Yes, I was jealous of those painted creatures. When I posed there, but one idea lent me the courage that I needed. I wanted to fight them, I hoped to win you back! Oh, God! how ashamed I was sometimes! What grief I had to swallow at finding myself so disdained and so betrayed! Since then your contempt has only increased; and now, as you know, we have come to the point of lying down side by side every night like two strangers. It has lasted eight months and seven days; I have counted the time. Yes, eight months and seven days."

She continued boldly, she now spoke out freely—she, so strangely compounded of ardor and modesty, so ardent in love, and so discreet afterwards, who would never speak of all those things, but turned her head away with a confused smile. And she was not mistaken in her jealousy when she accused his art. She knew very well why he neglected her like that.

"You repulse me," she violently concluded; "you draw back from me as if I were displeasing to you. You go elsewhere, and to love what? A nothing, a mere semblance, a little dust, some color spread on a canvas! But, once more, look at her, look at your woman up there! See what a monster you have made of her in your madness. Wake up, open your eyes, return to life again!"

Claude, obeying the imperious gesture with which she pointed to the picture, had now risen and was looking. The candle, which had stayed up there, on the platform of the steps, illumined the woman like a taper in front of an altar, whilst all the vast room remained plunged in darkness. He was at length awakening from his dream, and the woman, thus seen from below, at a distance of a few paces, filled him with stupefaction. Who had just painted this idol of some unknown religion? Who had wrought her of metals, marbles and gems? Was it he who had unconsciously created this unhuman presentment of flesh, which had become transformed into gold and diamonds under his fingers, in his vain effort to make it live! And, gaping, he felt afraid of his work, trembling at thought of this sudden plunge into the infinite, and understanding very well that it had become impossible for him to depict Reality, despite his long effort to conquer it and remould it, making it yet more real with his man's hands.

"You see! you see!" Christine repeated, victoriously.

And he, in a very low voice, stammered:

"Oh! what have I done? Is it impossible to create then? Haven't our hands the power to create beings?"

She felt that he was giving way, and she caught him in her arms:

"But why all this folly, why think of anything else but me, I who love you? You took me for your model, you made copies of me. What was the use, say? Are these copies worth me? They are frightful, they are

stiff and cold like corpses! But I am alive, and I love you. One must tell you everything, you don't understand one; but when I loiter near you, when I offer to pose, when I am there brushing against you, beneath your breath, it means that I love you—do you hear? It means that I am alive, and that you must be mine—"

Her face had become swollen, her soft eyes and limpid forehead were hidden by the twisted locks of her hair; she only showed her salient jaw, her square, determined chin, her ruddy lips.

"Oh! no, leave me," muttered Claude. "Oh, I am too unhappy!"

But in her ardent voice she answered:

"Perhaps you think that I am old. Yes, you told me that my figure was getting spoilt, and I myself believed it. I examined myself, I looked for the wrinkles while I was posing. But all that wasn't true! I feel it well enough; I have not grown old. I am still young, still strong!" Then, as he continued struggling: "Look!" she cried.

She had taken three steps backward, and, with a wide-spreading gesture, displayed herself in that pose which she had retained during so many long sittings. And with a simple movement of her chin she called his attention to the picture.

"Oh! you can compare; I am younger than she is. Although you have incrusted jewels in her flesh, she's faded like a dry leaf. But I, I am still eighteen, because I love you!"

And, indeed, in the pale light she looked radiant with youth.

"Oh! come, oh, let us love one another! Have you no blood in your veins then, that shadows suffice you? Come and you will see how sweet it is to live!"

He quivered, and little by little he returned her caress, in the fright which the other one, the idol, had caused him. She was softening him and conquering him.

"Listen, I know that you had a frightful thought; yes, I never dared to speak to you about it, because one must never draw on misfortune; but I no longer sleep of a night, you frighten me! This evening I followed you to that bridge which I hate, and I trembled, oh! I thought that it was all over—that I had lost you! Oh, God! what would become of me? I need you, you surely don't want to kill me! Let us love one another, yes, love one another!"

Then he yielded in the emotion caused him by this infinite love. It was an immense sadness, a vanishing of the whole world in which his being melted. He pressed her wildly to him, sobbing and stammering:

"It is true I had that frightful thought—I should have done it, and I resisted on thinking of that unfinished picture! But can I still live if work will have nothing more to do with me? How can I live after that, after what's there, what I spoilt just now?"

"I will love you and you will live."

"Ah! you will never love me enough—I know myself. Some delight which does not exist would be necessary, something which would make me forget everything! You cannot accomplish anything!"

"Yes, yes, you will see!"

This time he was conquered.

"Well, save me. Yes, take me if you don't want me to kill myself! And invent happiness, let me know some delight which will retain me! Lull me, annihilate me, so that I may become your thing, slave enough, small enough to dwell under your feet, in your slippers! Ah! to live only to obey you like a dog, to eat and sleep —if I could, if I only could!"

She raised a cry of victory:

"At last you are mine! there is only myself left, the other one is quite dead!"

And she dragged him from the execrated painting, she carried him into her room triumphantly. The

candle, now nearly burnt, flared up for a minute behind them on the steps and then went out. Five o'clock struck at the cuckoo clock, not a gleam as yet illumined the hazy November sky. And everything subsided once more into chilly darkness.

Then provokingly, domineeringly, with a laugh of pride, she made him blaspheme:

"Say that painting is idiotic."

"Painting is idiotic."

"Say that you won't work any more, that you don't care a fig for it, that you will burn your paintings to please me."

"I will burn my paintings and I won't work any more."

When the dawn appeared, yellowishly dirty, like a splash of liquid mud on the window panes, he started, fancying that he heard a loud voice calling to him from the far end of the studio. All his old thoughts had returned, overflowing and torturing him, hollowing his cheeks and contracting his jaws, in the disgust he felt for humanity. Two wrinkles imparted intense bitterness to the expression of his face, which was like the wasted countenance of an old man.

Suddenly the loud voice at the far end of the studio imperiously summoned him a second time. And then he made up his mind, it was all over, he suffered too much, he could no longer live, since everything was a lie, since there was nothing good upon earth. He had broken the chain at last; he was free. A third summons made him hasten, and he went to the studio, saying:

"Yes, yes, I'm coming."

The sky did not clear, it was still dirty and mournful, one of those lugubrious winter dawns; and an hour later Christine awoke with a great chilly shiver. She did not understand at first. How did it happen that she was alone? Then she remembered: she had fallen asleep with her cheek against his heart. How was it then that

he had been able to leave her? Where could he be? Suddenly, amid her torpor, she sprang, with violence, out of bed, and ran into the studio. Good God! had he returned to the other one? Had the other one seized hold of him again, when she herself fancied that she had conquered him forever?

She saw nothing at the first glance she took; in the cold and muddy morning twilight the studio seemed to her to be deserted. But as she was tranquillizing herself at seeing nobody there, she raised her eyes to the canvas, and a terrible cry leapt from her gaping mouth:

"Claude, oh! Claude!"

Claude had hanged himself from the steps in front of his spoilt work. He had simply taken one of the cords which held the frame to the wall, and he had mounted on the platform, so as to fasten the rope to an oaken crosspiece, which he himself had one day nailed to the uprights to consolidate them. Then from up above he had leapt into space. He was hanging there in his shirt, with his feet bare, looking horrible with his black tongue, and his bloodshot eyes which had started from their orbits; he seemed to have grown frightfully tall in his motionless stiffness, and his face was turned towards the picture, close to the woman, as if he had wished to infuse his soul into her with his last gasp, and as if he were still looking at her with his expressionless eyes.

Christine, however, remained erect, quite turned with the grief, fright and anger which dilated her body. Only a continuous howl came from her throat. She opened her arms, stretched them out towards the picture, and clenched both hands.

"Oh, Claude! oh, Claude!" she gasped at last, "she has taken you back—the hussy has killed you, killed you, killed you!"

And then her legs gave way. She span round and fell all of a heap upon the tiled flooring. Her excessive suffering had taken all the blood from her heart, and,

fainting away, she lay there, as if she were dead, like a white rag, miserable, done for, crushed beneath the fierce sovereignty of Art. Above her the woman was radiant in her symbolic idol's brightness; painting triumphed, alone immortal and erect, even when mad.

At nine o'clock on the Monday morning, when Sandoz, after the formalities and delay occasioned by the suicide, arrived in the Rue Tourlaque for the funeral, he only found a score or so of people on the footway. Despite his great grief, he had been running about for three days, compelled to attend to everything. At first, Christine having been picked up half-dead, he had been obliged to have her carried to the Hôpital de Lariboisière; then he had gone from the municipal offices to the undertakers and the church, paying everywhere, and full of indifference so far as that went, since the priests were willing to pray over this corpse with a black circle round its neck. Among the people who were waiting he as yet only perceived some neighbors, together with a few inquisitive folks; while there were faces looking out of the house windows and whispering together, excited by the drama. Claude's friends would, no doubt, soon come. He, Sandoz, had not been able to write to any members of the family as he did not know their addresses; but he retreated into the background on the arrival of two relatives, whom three dry lines in the newspapers had roused from the forgetfulness in which Claude himself, no doubt, had left them: an old female cousin,* with the equivocal air of a dealer in second-hand goods, and a male cousin, of the second degree, very rich, decorated with the Legion of Honor, owning one of the large Paris shops, good-naturedly condescending in his elegance, and desirous of showing his enlightened taste for art. The female cousin at once went up-stairs, turned round the

* Madame Sidonie who figures in M. Zola's novel, "In the Whirlpool." The male cousin, mentioned immediately afterwards, is Octave Mouret the hero of "Pot-Bouille" and "The Shop Girls of Paris."

studio, sniffed at all this bare wretchedness, and then walked down again, with a hard mouth and irritated at having taken the trouble to come. The second cousin, on the contrary, drew himself up and walked first behind the hearse, filling the part of chief mourner with proud and pleasant fitness.

As the procession was starting off, Bongrand came up, and, after shaking hands with Sandoz, remained beside him. He was gloomy, and, glancing at the fifteen or twenty persons who followed, he murmured:

"Ah! poor chap! What! are there only we two?"

Dubuche was at Cannes with his children. Jory and Fagerolles kept away, the former hating the deceased and the latter being too busy. Mahoudeau alone caught the party up at the rise of the Rue Lepic, and he explained that Gagnière must have missed the train.

The hearse slowly ascended the steep thoroughfare, which winds round the flanks of the height of Montmartre; and now and then cross streets sloping downward, sudden gaps amid the houses, showed one the immensity of Paris as deep and as broad as a sea. When the party arrived in front of the Church of St. Pierre, and the coffin was carried up the steps, it overtopped the great city for a moment. There was a gray wintry sky overhead, large masses of clouds blew along carried away by an icy wind, and Paris seemed to be enlarged, to become endless in this mist, filling the horizon with its threatening billows. The poor fellow who had wished to conquer it, and who had broken his neck in the fruitlessness of his effort, passed in front of it, nailed under an oaken board, returning to the earth like one of the city's muddy waves.

On leaving the church the female cousin disappeared, Mahoudeau likewise; while the second cousin again took his position behind the hearse. Seven other unknown persons decided to follow, and they started for the new cemetery of St. Ouen, to which the people have given

the disquieting and lugubrious name of Cayenne. There were ten mourners in all.

"Well, we two shall be the only friends," repeated Bongrand, as he began walking again beside Sandoz.

The procession, preceded by the mourning coach in which the priest and the singing boy were seated, now descended the other side of the height, down winding streets as precipitous as mountain paths. The horses of the hearse slipped over the slimy pavement; you could hear the wheels jolting noisily. Right behind, the ten mourners took little steps, trying to avoid the puddles, and so occupied with the difficulty of the descent that they refrained from speaking. But at the bottom of the Rue du Ruisseau, when they reached the Porte de Clignancourt, amid the vast open spaces, where the boulevard running round the city, the circular railway, the talus and moats of the fortifications were displayed to view, there were sighs of relief, a few words were exchanged, and the party began to straggle.

Sandoz and Bongrand by degrees found themselves behind all the others, as if they had wished to isolate themselves from these folks whom they had never seen before. Just as the hearse was passing the city gate, the painter leant towards the novelist.

"And the little woman, what is going to be done with her?"

"Ah! how dreadful it is!" replied Sandoz. "I went to see her yesterday at the hospital. She has brain fever. The house doctor maintains that they will save her, but that she will come out of it ten years older and without any strength. Do you know that she had come to such a point that she no longer knew how to spell. Such a fall, quite crushing, a young lady abased to the level of a servant! Yes, if we don't take care of her like a cripple, she will end by becoming a scullery maid somewhere!"

"And not a copper, of course?"

"Not a copper. I thought I should find the studies Claude made from nature for his large picture, those superb studies which he afterwards turned to such poor account. But I ferreted everywhere; he gave everything away; people robbed him. No, nothing to sell, not a canvas that could be turned to profit, nothing but that huge picture which I demolished and burnt with my own hands, and right gladly, I assure you, like one avenges one's self!"

They became silent for a moment. The broad road leading to St. Ouen stretched away quite straight, as far as the eye could reach; and amid the plain the procession went on, pitifully small, lost, as it were, on this highway, along which there flowed a river of mud. A line of palings bordered it on either side, waste land extended both to right and left, while afar off one only saw some factory chimneys and a few lofty white houses, standing alone, obliquely to the road. They passed through the Clignancourt fête with booths, circuses and roundabouts on either side, all shivering in the abandonment of winter, empty dancing cribs, mouldy swings, a kind of stage homestead, The Picardy Farm, looking dismally sad between its broken fences.

"Ah! his old canvases," resumed Bongrand, "the things he had at the Quai de Bourbon, do you remember them? There were some extraordinary bits among them. The landscapes he brought back from the South and the academy studies painted at Boutin's. Oh! yes, yes, the fellow was no fool—simply a great painter!"

"When I think," said Sandoz, "that those little humbugs of the School and the press accused him of idleness and ignorance, repeating one after the other that he had always refused to learn his art! Idle! good heavens, why I have seen him faint with fatigue after sittings ten hours long; he gave his whole life to his work and killed himself in his passion for toil! And they call him ignorant—how idiotic! they will never understand that

the individual gift which a man brings in his nature is superior to acquired knowledge. Delacroix, also, was ignorant of his profession in their eyes, simply because he could not confine himself to hard and fast rules! Ah! the ninnies, the good pupils lacking blood who are incapable of painting anything incorrectly!"

He took a few steps in silence and then he added:

"A heroic worker, a passionate observer whose brain had crammed itself with science, the temperament of a great artist with admirable gifts. And to think that he leaves nothing, nothing."

"Absolutely nothing, not a canvas," declared Bongrand. "I know nothing of his but rough drafts, sketches, notes carelessly jotted down, as it were, all that artistic paraphernalia which can't be submitted to the public. Yes, indeed, it is really a dead man, dead completely, whom they are going to lower into the earth."

However, the painter and the novelist now had to hasten their steps, for they had got far behind while talking; and the hearse, after rolling past taverns and shops full of funereal monuments, was turning to the right into the short avenue leading to the cemetery. They overtook it, and passed through the gateway with the little procession. The priest in his surplice and the singing boy carrying the holy water receiver, who had both alighted from the mourning coach, walked on ahead.

It was a large, flat cemetery, still in its youth, laid out by rule and line in the suburban waste land, and cut up into squares by large symmetrical paths. A few raised tombs bordered the principal avenues, but most of the graves, already very numerous, were on a level with the soil. They were hastily arranged, and but temporary sepulchres, for five year grants were the only ones that could be obtained; and the hesitation of families to go to serious expense, the stones sinking for

lack of foundations, the scrubby evergreens which had not yet had time to grow, all this provisional slop kind of mourning lent the vast field of repose a look of poverty and cold, clean nudity, dismal like a barrack or a hospital. There was not a corner to be found recalling the nooks sung of in the ballads of the romantic period, not one leafy turn, quivering with mystery, not a single large tomb speaking of pride and eternity. You were in the new style of cemetery, where everything was set out straight and duly numbered—the cemetery of democratic capitals, where the dead seem to slumber at the bottom of an office drawer, each morning's tide dislodging and replacing that of the day before, where the dead pass along one by one in a file, as people do at a fête under the eyes of the police, so as to avoid obstruction.

"Dash it!" muttered Bongrand, "it isn't gay here."

"Why not?" asked Sandoz. "It's commodious; there is plenty of air. And even although there is no sun, see what a pretty color it all has."

In fact, under the gray sky of this November morning, in the penetrating quiver of the wind, the low tombs, loaded with garlands and crowns of beads, assumed soft tints of charming delicacy. There were some quite white, and others all black, according to the color of the beads; but the contrast lost much of its strength amid the pale green foliage of the dwarfish trees. Families exhausted their affection for the dear departed in decking these five year grants; crowns were piled up and flowers bloomed—freshly brought there on the recent Day of the Dead. Only the cut flowers had as yet faded, between their paper collars. Some crowns of yellow immortelles shone out like freshly chiselled gold. But the beads so predominated that there seemed to be nothing else; they gushed forth everywhere, hiding the inscriptions and covering the stones and railings—beads forming hearts, beads in festoons and medallions, beads framing little

ornamental designs, or objects under glass, pansies, hands entwined, satin bows, and even photographs of women, yellow, faded, cheap photographs, showing poor, ugly, touching faces, smiling awkwardly.

As the hearse proceeded along the Avenue du Rond-Point, Sandoz, whose last remark of an artistic nature had brought him back to Claude, resumed the conversation, saying:

"This is a cemetery which he would have understood, he who was so mad on modern things. No doubt he suffered physically, wasted away by the over severe lesion that is so often akin to genius, three grains too little, or three grains too much of some substance in the brain, as he himself said when he reproached his parents for having constituted him so funnily. However, his disorder was not merely a personal affair, he was the victim of our period. Yes, our generation has soaked up to the stomach in romanticism, and we have remained impregnated with it. It is in vain that we wash ourselves and take baths of reality, the stain is obstinate, and all the scrubbing in the world won't take its smell away."

Bongrand smiled. "Oh! as for romanticism," said he, "I'm up to my ears in it. It has fed my art, and, indeed, I'm impenitent. If it be true that my final paralysis is due to that, well, after all, what does it matter? I can't deny the religion of all my artistic life. However, your remark is quite correct; you other fellows, you are rebellious sons. Claude, for instance, with his big woman amid the quays, that extravagant symbol—"

"Ah, that woman!" interrupted Sandoz, "it was she who throttled him. If you knew how he cared for her! I was never able to cast her out of him. And how can one possibly have clear perception, a solid, properly-balanced brain when such phantasmagoria sprout forth from your skull? Though coming after yours, our generation is too imaginative to leave healthy works behind it. Another generation, perhaps two, will be

required before people paint and write logically, with the high, pure simplicity of truth. Truth, nature alone, is the right basis, the necessary guide, outside of which madness begins; and the toiler needn't be afraid of flattening his work, his temperament is there which will always carry him sufficiently away. Does any one dream of denying personality, the involuntary thumb-stroke which deforms whatever we touch, and constitutes our poor creativeness?"

However, he turned his head, and involuntarily added:

"Hallo! what's burning? Are they lighting bonfires here?"

The procession had turned on reaching the Rond-Point, where the ossuary was situated—the common vault gradually filled with all the remnants removed from the graves, and the stone of which, in the centre of a circular lawn, disappeared under a heap of wreaths, deposited there by the pious relatives of those who no longer had an individual resting-place. And, as the hearse rolled slowly to the left in transversal Avenue No. 2, there had come a sound of crackling, and a thick smoke had risen above the little plane trees bordering the path. Some distance ahead, as the party approached, they could see a large pile of earthy things beginning to burn, and they ended by understanding. The fire was lighted at the edge of a large square patch of ground, which had been dug up in broad parallel furrows, so as to remove the coffins before allotting the soil to other corpses; just as the peasant turns the stubble over before sowing afresh. The long empty furrows seemed to yawn, the mounds of rich soil seemed to be purifying themselves under the sky; and the fire thus burning in this corner was formed of the rotten wood of the coffins, slit, broken boards, eaten into by the earth, often reduced to a ruddy humus, and gathered there in an enormous pile. They

broke up with dull-sounding detonations, and being damp with human mud, they refused to flame, merely smoking with growing intensity. Large columns of smoke rose into the pale sky, and were beaten down by the November wind, and torn into ruddy shreds, which flew across the low tombs of quite one-half of the cemetery.

Sandoz and Bongrand had looked at the scene without saying a word. Then, when they had passed the fire, the former resumed:

"No, he did not prove to be the man of the formula he laid down. I mean that his genius was not clear enough to enable him to set that formula erect, and impose it upon the world by a definite masterpiece. And now see how other fellows scatter their efforts around him, after him. They go no farther than roughing off, they give us but hasty impressions, and not one of them seems to have strength enough to become the master who is awaited. Isn't it irritating, this new notion of light, this passion for truth carried as far as scientific analysis, this evolution, begun with such originality, and now loitering on the way, as it were, falling into the hands of tricksters, and not coming to a head, simply because the necessary man isn't born? But pooh! the man will be born; nothing is ever lost, light must be."

"Who knows?—not always," said Bongrand. "Life miscarries like everything else. I listen to you, you know, but I'm a despairer. I am dying of sadness, and I feel that everything else is dying. Ah! yes, there is something unhealthy in the atmosphere of the times—this end of a century crowded with demolitions, full of rent monuments, with soil that has been turned over and over a hundred times, the whole exhaling a stench of death! Can anybody remain in good health amid all that? Your nerves become unhinged, the great neurosis is there, art grows unsettled, there is a general bustling, perfect anarchy, all the madness of self-love at

bay. Never have people quarrelled more and seen less clearly than since it is pretended that one knows everything."

Sandoz, who had grown pale, watched the large ruddy coils of smoke rolling in the wind.

"It was fatal," he mused in an undertone. "This excessive activity and pride of knowledge was bound to cast us back into doubt. This century, which has already thrown so much light over the world, was bound to finish amid the threat of a fresh flow of darkness—yes, our discomfort comes from that. Too much has been promised, too much has been hoped for; people have looked forward to the conquest and explanation of everything, and now they growl impatiently. What! don't things go quicker than that? What! hasn't science managed to bring us absolute certainty, perfect happiness in a hundred years? Then what is the use of going on, since one will never know everything, and one's bread will always be as bitter? It is as if the century had become bankrupt, as if it had failed; pessimism twists people's bowels, mysticism fogs their brains; for we have vainly swept phantoms away with the light of analysis, the supernatural has resumed hostilities, the spirit of the legend rebels, and wants to conquer us, while we are halting with fatigue and anguish. Ah! I certainly don't affirm anything; I myself am tortured. Only it seems to me that this last convulsion of the old religious terrors was to be foreseen. We are not the end, we are but a transition, a beginning of something else. It calms me and does me good to believe that we are marching towards reason and the solidity of science."

His voice had become husky with deep emotion, and he added:

"That is, unless madness plunges us, topsy-turvy, into night again, and we all go off throttled by the ideal,

like the old friend who sleeps there between his four boards."

The hearse was leaving transversal Avenue No. 2 to turn, on the right, into lateral Avenue No. 3, and the painter, without speaking, called the novelist's attention to a square plot of graves, beside which the procession was now passing.

There was here a children's cemetery, nothing but children's tombs, stretching far away, set out in orderly fashion, separated at regular intervals by narrow paths and looking like some infantine city of death. There were tiny little white crosses, tiny little white railings, disappearing almost beneath an efflorescence of white and blue wreaths, on a level with the soil; and the peaceful field of repose, so soft in color, with the bluey tint of milk about it, seemed to have been made flowery by all the childhood lying in the earth. The crosses recorded the various ages, two years, sixteen months, five months. One poor little cross, destitute of any railing, was out of line, having been set up slantingly across a path, and it simply bore these words: "Eugénie, three days." Not to be at yet, and withal to sleep there already, on one side, like the children who on fête occasions dine at a little side-table!

However, the hearse had at last stopped, in the middle of the avenue; and when Sandoz saw the grave ready at the corner of the next division and in front of the cemetery of the little ones, he murmured tenderly:

"Ah! my poor old Claude, with your big child's heart, you will be in your place beside them!"

The underbearers removed the coffin from the hearse. The priest, who looked surly in the wind, was waiting; some sextons stood there with their shovels. Three neighbors had fallen off on the road, the ten had dwindled into seven. The second cousin, who had been holding his hat in his hand since leaving the church,

despite the frightful weather, now drew nearer. All the others uncovered, and the prayers were about to begin, when a loud, piercing whistle made every head look up.

Beyond this corner of the cemetery as yet untenanted, at the end of lateral Avenue No. 3, a train was passing along the high embankment of the circular railway, the line of which overlooked the cemetery. The grassy slope rose up, and geometrical lines, as it were, stood out black against the gray sky; telegraph posts, connected by thin wires, a superintendent's box and a signal plate, the only red, throbbing speck around. When the train rolled past, with its thunder crash, one plainly distinguished, as on the transparency of a shadow play, the outlines of the carriages, even the people showing their heads in the light gaps of the windows. And the line became clear again, a simple ink stroke across the horizon; while afar other whistles unceasingly called, and wailed, shrill with anger, hoarse with suffering, or choking with distress. Then a guard's horn resounded lugubriously.

"*Revertitur in terram suam unde erat,*" recited the priest, who had opened a book and was making haste.

But he was not heard, for a large engine had come up puffing, and was manœuvring backwards and forwards just above the ceremony. It had a huge thick voice, a guttural whistle, intensely melancholy. It came and went, panting, and seen in profile it looked like a heavy monster. Suddenly, moreover, it let off steam, with the furious blowing of a tempest.

"*Requiescat in pace,*" said the priest.

"*Amen,*" replied the singing boy.

But the words were lost amid this lashing, deafening detonation, which was prolonged with the continuous violence of a fusillade.

Bongrand, who was exasperated, turned towards the engine. It became silent fortunately, and every one felt

relieved. Tears had risen to the eyes of Sandoz, who had already been stirred by the words which had involuntarily passed his lips, while he walked behind his old comrade, as if they had been having one of their intoxicating chats of yore; and now it seemed to him that his youth was about to be consigned to the earth; it was part of himself, the best part, his illusions and his enthusiasm which the sextons were taking away to slip into the depths of a hole. At this terrible moment an accident occurred which increased his grief. It had rained so hard during the preceding days, and the ground was so soft that a sudden subsidence of the soil took place. One of the sextons had to jump into the grave, to empty it with his shovel with a slow rhythmical movement. There was no end to the matter, this funeral seemed likely to last forever amid the impatience of the priest and the interest of the four neighbors who had followed on to the end, nobody could say why. And up above on the embankment, the engine had begun manœuvring again, retreating, howling at each turn of the wheels, the fire-box open and lighting up the gloomy day with a rain of sparks.

At last the pit was emptied, the coffin lowered, and the aspergillus passed round. It was all over. The second cousin, standing erect, did the honors with his correct, pleasant air, shaking hands with all these people whom he had never previously seen, in memory of this relative whose name he had not remembered the day before.

"That linen-draper is a very decent fellow," said Bongrand, who was swallowing his tears.

"Quite so," replied Sandoz, sobbing.

All the others were going off, the surplices of the priest and the singing boy disappeared between the green trees, the straggling neighbors loitered, reading the inscriptions on the tombs.

And Sandoz, making up his mind to leave the grave now half filled up, resumed:

"We alone shall have known him. There is nothing left of him, not even a name."

"He is very happy," said Bongrand, "he has no picture on hand, in the earth where he sleeps! It is as well to go off as to toil like we do merely to turn out infirm children, who always lack something, their legs or their head, and who don't live."

"Yes, one must really be wanting in pride to resign one's self to turning out merely approximate work and resorting to trickery with life. I who bestow every care on my books, I despise myself, for I feel that, despite my efforts, they are incomplete and untruthful."

With pale faces, they went slowly away, side by side, past the children's white tombs, the novelist then in all the strength of his toil and fame, the painter, declining, but covered with glory.

"There, at least lies one who was logical and brave," continued Sandoz; "he confessed his powerlessness and killed himself."

"That's true," said Bongrand; "if we didn't care so much for our skins we should all do as he has done, eh?"

"Well, yes; since we cannot create anything; since we are but feeble copyists, we might as well put an end to ourselves at once."

They again found themselves before the burning pile of old rotten coffins, now fully alight, sweating and crackling; but there were still no flames to be seen, the smoke alone had increased—a thick acrid smoke, which the wind impelled in whirling coils, and which now covered the whole cemetery as with a cloud of mourning.

"Dash it! Eleven o'clock!" said Bongrand, after pulling out his watch. "I must get home again."

Sandoz gave an exclamation of surprise:

"What! already eleven!"

Over the low-lying graves, over the vast bead-flowered field of death, so regularly set out and so cold, he cast a long look of despair, his sight still bedimmed by his tears. And then he added:

"Let us go to work!"

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BY ÉMILE ZOLA.

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